GOD'S WORD IN ENGLISH
CYNTHIA OZICK

FINALLY, A REAL DEBATE ON IRAQ
RYAN LIZZA, THE EDITORS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

BUSH V. GORE

★ ROUND 2 ★

THE ELECTION THAT'S HEADED FOR THE COURTS

NOV. 2 2004

BY JEFFREY ROSEN

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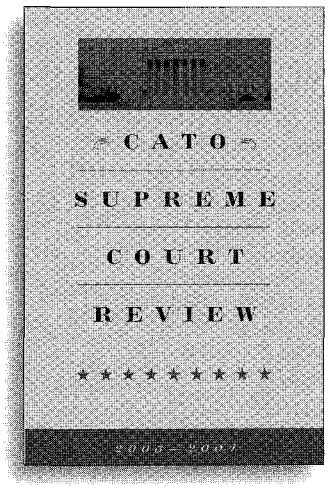

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SECTS EDUCATION

INGRID D. ROWLAND'S CRITIQUE OF *The Da Vinci Code* reminded me of the time several of my high school students came to me all excited by the *true* supernatural events in *The Amityville Horror* (August 16 & 23). "In what section of the library did you find this book?" I asked. "In the fiction section," they innocently responded. Case closed.

Also, the alleged secret marriage of Christ and Mary Magdalen was no secret to the medieval Church's heresy-hunters. A belief in that spicy bit of gossip was part of the allegations lodged against the Albigenses (a branch of the larger Cathar movement) during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I wonder if Dan Brown sees himself as a belated martyr for tired old heresies that ultimately stemmed from Zoroastrianism and Manichaeanism, one of St. Augustine's favorite whipping boys, or just another con man writing thriller fiction.

NORMAN RUDNICK
Oakland, California

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE

PETER BEINART AGREES WITH SENATOR Joe Biden's assessment that we are at war with "radical fundamentalism" and not terrorism, and he notes that, "If militants in Iraq shoot only at American soldiers and not at civilians, they are not technically terrorists—but they are our enemies nonetheless" ("Ask Not," August 16 & 23). I agree that Iraq militants aren't practicing terrorism when they attack American troops, but they aren't religious fundamentalists either. They are mostly a combination of Baathists and nationalists who happen to be Muslim. There might be a few fundamentalists in the bunch, as there are certainly plenty of genuine terrorists among them. But Iraqi militants in general are as bad an example of fundamentalism as they are of terrorism.

ALEXANDER FRANKEL
Chicago, Illinois

WHY VOTERS AREN'T HAPPY WITH THE ECONOMY
JULY SURPRISED
THE NEW REPUBLIC
RENAISSANCE WEEKEND
Why America Is Taking Leonardo and Botticelli to the Beach
INGRID D. ROWLAND

BIDEN REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO "radical fundamentalism" as the enemy, but Beinart translates this as "radical Islam." Fundamentalism is not a synonym for Islam. This is a critical distinction. The difference between the West and the Islamic world is not that we are Christians and they are Muslims, but rather that our governance is secular and theirs is religious. The Catholic Church had to have its own confrontation with science and philosophy beginning in the Renaissance, and, in a perverse sense, the severity of our religion during the Middle Ages may have led to a much more radical questioning of the epistemological underpinnings of religion. No, this battle is not about Islam versus the West. It is about religion versus reason. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson claimed that September 11 was God's punishment for feminism, abortion, and homosexuality. Bin Laden agrees wholeheartedly. Same church, different pew (though, with the exceptions of unjust executions, misguided wars, and a few anti-abortion doctor-killers, the American fundamentalists are not murderous). Bin Laden and Falwell both want to take us back to the days

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when religion wasn't threatened by modernism. Back when slavery and the subjugation of women was justified on biblical grounds. And the Bible does indeed condone both.

ROBERT A. SCHWEIZER
Media, Pennsylvania

APOCRYPHAL GOSPEL?

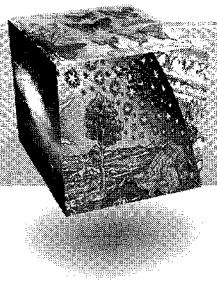
I WOULD HAVE LAUGHED HAPPILY ALL the way through James Wolcott's scathing review of *Dylan's Visions of Sin* by Christopher Ricks were it not for two points ("Idiot Wind," August 30). First, Dylan himself deflated all such lit-crit nitwits back in 1969, when *Rolling Stone* asked him about a "Dylanologist" busy analyzing his lyrics. He replied, "I don't really know if there's enough material in my songs to sustain someone who is really out to do a big job. . . . I mean, a fellow like that would be much better off writing about Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky."

Second, Wolcott dismisses Dylan's musical departures from the rock sound associated with the '60s counterculture. He ridicules the "schlocky" arrangement of Dylan's gospel song "Gotta Serve Somebody" for having "black-chick backup" and "brassy horns." As it happens, that Grammy-winning track was produced by Jerry Wexler, who also produced Aretha Franklin's greatest hits, and featured Mark Knopfler on guitar. As for the backup, it was by black gospel singers, but why call them "chicks"? I won't even ask why the horns are condemned as "brassy"—would Wolcott prefer mother-of-pearl? That sound was always good enough for Ray Charles—or is he "ersatz gospel" as well?

MARTHA BAYLES
Boston, Massachusetts

THANKS TO WOLCOTT FOR POINTING out the obvious—that Christopher Ricks's book about Bob Dylan has no clothes. On the basis of Ricks's esteemed reputation, fueled further by the inexplicable gush review in *The New York Times*, I bought seven copies of the book sight unseen: one for myself and six to give to some of my kids and other friends who are big Dylan enthusiasts. Thanks to "Idiot Wind," I can now include Wolcott's informed, insightful, and witty review in my letters of apology.

JAMES HALLOWELL
Cambridge, Massachusetts



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Columnist
The New York Times

October 21, 2004
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Double Standards II

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

As far as I can tell, George W. Bush believes three things about his war on terrorism. First, it can only be won by promoting democracy. Second, the more integral a country is to the war on terrorism, the less principle number one applies. Third, moral consistency matters above all else.

If this sounds like an intellectual train wreck, it is. Consider the White House's response to the recent horror in Russia. On September 3, a terrorist attack left more than 300 people dead in the southern city of Beslan. The massacre reaffirmed Russia's critical role in the war on terrorism. And, since the Bush administration believes democracy is the key to winning the war on terrorism, that reaffirmation should have prompted a renewed U.S. push for Russian democracy.

Instead, it had the opposite effect. On September 12, with rumors swirling that Russian President Vladimir Putin was planning an authoritarian crackdown, Bush visited the Russian Embassy and ignored democracy altogether—merely saying, "The United States stands side by side with Russia as we fight off terrorism." The next day, Putin proposed that Russia's governors be chosen essentially by him, not the voters, and that independent candidates be banned from running for the Duma. One opposition Duma member told *The Wall Street Journal* that "Putin is exploiting these terror attacks to strangle democracy." The White House responded by telling *The New York Times*, in the words of one official, that "this is a domestic matter for the Russian people." When that soft line sparked criticism, Bush eventually said he was "concerned about the decisions that are being made in Russia." But, as an official explained to the *Journal*, the administration's general view is that, given the recent attacks, Russia is the wrong place to pick a fight over democracy.

That basic contradiction—that this administration promotes democracy least where the war on terrorism matters most—runs throughout Bush's foreign policy. Consider U.S. behavior toward two of the countries closest to terrorism's frontline: Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Uzbekistan's secular dictator, Islam Karimov, nicely illustrates the Bush administration's argument that repression fuels terrorism. His regime jails, and often tortures, anyone who seems excessively religious—and thus, Uzbekistan's once largely peaceful Islamist movement is turning violent. It would seem like exactly the kind of place the United States would be pushing democracy hard. Instead, in March 2002, the Bush administration signed a "strategic partnership" with Uzbekistan that has paved the way for hundreds of millions in U.S. aid. That money is supposed to be conditioned on human rights improvements. But, as *The American Prospect*'s Matthew Yglesias recently pointed out, the United States has waived those requirements for the last two years. The reason? Uzbekistan, which provides a base for American troops operating in neighboring Afghanistan, is too important to the war on terrorism. As Democratic Representative Gary Ackerman recently put it, Karimov "has learned that all he really needs to do is provide us with assistance in the global war on terrorism and that the rest is really not that important."

In Pakistan, the story is depressingly similar. In October 2002, General Pervez Musharraf, having taken power in a coup, rigged elections for Pakistan's reconstituted parliament. He banned the leaders of Pakistan's two largest secular parties—the greatest threats to his power—paving the way for Islamists to double their support. The European Union called the balloting "seriously flawed." But the Bush administration deemed it "an important milestone in Pakistan's ongoing transition to democracy," and, several months later, it rewarded Musharraf with a $3 billion aid package. Asked about America's unwillingness promote Pakistani democracy, Representative David Dreier, a Bush administration ally, recently told *National Journal*, "Our number one priority is winning the war on terror"—as if democracy were irrelevant to that goal.

In Saudi Arabia, the Middle Eastern country where Al Qaeda has the deepest roots, the United States has also avoided serious democratization pressure. Everyone knows the Saudi royals are brutal and corrupt. Everyone knows that, for years, they have diverted their people's fury into global jihad. But, having relentlessly fomented Islamist extremism, the Saudis now warn the Bush administration that they cannot allow real political participation for fear that extremists will grab control. So, when Riyadh balked at the White House's much-hyped Greater Middle East Initiative this spring, the United States retreated, with Colin Powell meekly suggesting, "Each nation has to find its own path [to democracy] and follow that path at its own speed."

In theory, perhaps one could reconcile the president's democratic rhetoric with his anti-democratic policies. Faced with a similar contradiction during the cold war, conservative intellectual Jeane Kirkpatrick famously distinguished "traditional," or pro-American, autocracies from "revolutionary," or anti-American, ones—defending support for the former as a means of preventing the latter. Kirkpatrick argued that pro-Western dictatorships like the Shah's Iran or Anastasio Somoza's Nicaragua were more benign, and more capable of democratic change, than the anti-American regimes that followed them.

It is not clear how one would update that logic to distinguish, say, pro-American Saudi Arabia, which has no democratic mechanisms whatsoever, from anti-American Iran, which has regular, partially free elections. But it remains a theoretical question because Bush officials don't grapple with the intellectual contradiction underlying their war on terrorism—they ignore it. On the stump, the president relentlessly touts what he called, in a recent speech in Colorado, his "steady, consistent, principled leadership." Bush's key foreign policy selling point—in contrast to "flip-flopper" John Kerry—is his moral consistency. And his supporters don't want to undermine that claim by acknowledging that, in fact, his conduct of the war on terrorism rests upon a giant moral inconsistency.

But, if voters in Ohio and Wisconsin don't notice the sleight of hand, that's OK. Dictators from Moscow to Islamabad to Riyadh surely do.

PETER BEINART

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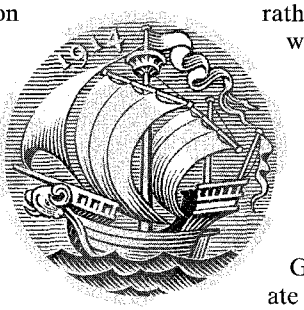
Fool Me Once

ALL POLITICIANS STRETCH truth to present accomplishments in the most appealing light. What President Bush has told the country over the past week about the deeply troubled Iraq occupation, however, is different. While an increasingly strong insurgency murdered 250 Iraqis last week, he portrayed the occupation as gliding to success. Last week, Bush told the Manchester *Union-Leader*, "I'm pleased with the progress." The template the administration is using for its portrayal of Iraq is the one the Johnson administration perfected during Vietnam: To win reelection, Bush is lying.

Not only has there been no recent progress in Iraq, there has been much backsliding over the past six months. Two weeks ago, a research team from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) released the most comprehensive study about events on the ground. Originally invited to study Iraq at the behest of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, CSIS said, "In every sector we looked at, we saw backward movement in recent months." This is the opposite of "progress," and the administration knows it. In a July National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), its own analysts reported that the best outcome in Iraq is a barely contained insurgency and tenuous stability. In other words, what last year was among the *worst*-case scenarios is now the *best*.

The president has a response to those who honestly depict the situation in Iraq: dismissal. "Just guessing," Bush shrugged at the NIE. The Iraqis "are defying the dire predictions of a lot of people by moving toward democracy," he said last week. In fact, the only predictions Iraqis have defied are his own. First they defied his prediction that they would accept instantaneous post-Saddam rule by expatriates. Then they defied his prediction that they would accept an open-ended occupation. Then they defied his prediction that they would accept an interim government chosen by convoluted caucuses. Then they defied his prediction that the U.S. military could rely on poorly trained Iraqi forces to combat the insurgency. Then they defied his prediction that the transfer of notional sovereignty to the interim government would destroy the insurgency's popular support.

And now it is dawning on observers that the latest prediction Iraqis will defy is that they are "moving toward democracy." "The Americans have created a series of fictional [election] dates and events in order to delude themselves," Ghassan Atiyya, director of the Iraq Foundation for Development and Democracy, recently told *Newsweek*. Even American ground commander Thomas Metz, commenting on the fact that most of Al Anbar Province is controlled by the insurgency, admitted, "I don't think today you could hold elections."



In response, the administration is telegraphing that, should it win reelection, it will insist on Iraqi elections nonetheless and call them legitimate, even if they are unfree and unfair. In a recent address to the National Press Club, Rumsfeld shrugged, "I've never seen an election anywhere that's perfect," as if Iraq were West Palm Beach. Iraqis are more honest. Interim President Ghazi Al Yawer declared last week, "We do not want to have elections for the sake of elections. It's the outcome of the elections that's most important." By which he surely means an outcome that will preserve his power. For that reason, the Association of Muslim Scholars, which represents about 3,000 Sunni mosques, has announced it will boycott the vote. Sheik Abdul Satar Abdul Jabbar of the Association told *The New York Times*, "If the election goes forward anyway, the body that will be elected will not represent the country." This decision virtually ensures that elections could move Iraq closer to civil war. With most Sunnis refusing to cast ballots, the new government would lack legitimacy and take on a sectarian character, fostering even greater factional conflict. As Atiyya recently warned, "Badly prepared elections, rather than healing wounds, will open them."

There are brave Republicans who understand how disastrous the Bush administration's Iraq policy has proved. Referring to Bush's predictions, the GOP chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, remarked, "The nonsense of all that is apparent." But the nonsense has continued. Bush has enlisted Iyad Allawi to travel to Washington this week and claim the administration is delivering victory in Iraq. Unless more Republicans join Lugar and put truth above party, the lies will continue through Election Day and beyond. ■

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NOTEBOOK

DENNIS HASTERT CAN'T QUITE GET IT . . . FARM STATES GET FAR TOO MUCH

HASTERTIA

IF DENNIS HASTERT KEEPS TALKING, he may lose a reputation for reticence that we all undervalued. Playing attack dog for the GOP, the House speaker has tried his best to emulate his colleagues in the art of damning innuendo.

First there was Hastert's rebuke last May of Senator John McCain, who argued against further tax cuts on the grounds that war is a "time of sacrifice." Hastert, in response, offered this: "If you want to see sacrifice, John McCain ought to visit our young men and women at Walter Reed [Army Medical Center] and Bethesda [Naval Hospital]. There's the sacrifice in this country." As it happened, a few commentators at the time had the indelicacy to note that Hastert's own military experience was rather limited—well, zero, to be precise—whereas McCain's five-year stint as a POW in Vietnam (after being shot down on his twenty-third bombing run) was a bit more, um, extensive. Then there was the question of how Hastert's statement contradicted McCain's point at all. No matter; Hastert had gained new confidence in his role.

So, when the Republican convention hit New York, so did Hastert, suggesting on Fox News that billionaire financier George Soros, who has supported the Democrats, gets his money from the drug trade. When interviewer Chris Wallace stepped in to ask, "You think he may be getting money from the drug cartel?" Hastert clarified, "I'm saying we don't know. The fact is, we don't know where this money comes from." Leaving aside that we *do* know where Soros gets his money—a hedge-fund empire that includes the Quantum Fund comes to mind—Hastert's speculation is somehow liberating. Now, if anyone wishes to ask us here at THE NEW REPUBLIC if we're saying that Dennis Hastert is overweight from eating human babies, our answer is this: We're saying we don't know. The fact is, we don't know where the fat comes from.

Dennis Hastert

When Hastert recently asserted that John Kerry's first response to terrorism would be "to file a lawsuit with the World Court or something, rather than respond with troops," it became clear that Hastert was having a bit of trouble mastering the subtle skills of his fellow party members. Innuendo, after all, requires going just so far and no more—emphasizing, say, that George W. Bush will seek no "permission slip" to use military force, which, of course, implies that Kerry would. Hastert, on the other hand, is more like a swimsuit model who, sensing enthusiasm for revealing outfits, yanks the ensemble off entirely. And Hastert is no swimsuit model.

PLEASE, QUIT YOUR DAY JOB

"WE EITHER PULL OUT ALL THE stops over the next few weeks or we will live to regret it." That's James Carville, beginning a recent fund-raising letter on behalf of the Democratic National Committee. It sounds reasonable enough, until you consider that Carville himself hasn't exactly been giving his all to the Democratic effort. Yes, he and Paul Begala are playing "an increasingly prominent role," according to *The New York Times*, in advising the Kerry campaign; but Carville and Begala are also keeping their day jobs as hosts of CNN's "Crossfire." So far, this split-time arrangement has mostly brought grief upon CNN, and not just from the usual suspects. The liberal *Times* columnist Frank Rich wrote last weekend that "Crossfire" and CNN "are now as inextricably bound to the Democrats as Fox is to the Republicans."

But, while Rich and others attacking CNN are right to do so, all this criticism of the network lets Carville and Begala off the hook. The Carville-Begala-CNN mini-scandal wouldn't even be a story if the two simply took a leave of absence from "Crossfire." But neither one is willing to do so. So, while Carville has no compunction about asking Democrats to "take out your checkbook, right now, and write the most generous contribution you can afford," he himself is not willing to forgo his fat CNN salary to help Kerry out and put an end to this needless distraction from the Kerry campaign's message. If this is the most commitment Kerry can get from two of his party's leading operatives, it's no wonder his campaign is in trouble.

THE GREATEST GENERATION

"EACH YEAR, TWO MILLION PEOPLE who fought in the Second World War and lived through the Great Depression die. This generation has been an exception in American history, because it has defended anti-American policies. They voted for the creation of the welfare state and obligatory military service. They are the base of the Democratic Party. And they are dying." —Grover Norquist, the arch-conservative president of Ameri-

DAVID COWLES

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cans for Tax Reform, quoted in the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* on September 12

DOWN ON THE FARM: MORE PORK

THE ONLY CAPITOL HILL IMPULSE stronger than partisanship is self-preservation. That rule was evident last week during the Senate's debate over its annual homeland security spending bill. The Republicans shot down fully 16 Democratic amendments seeking more money for everything from baggage screening to port security. Many of the amendments had relatively modest price tags—$70 million to track hazardous-materials trucks and screen their drivers, $350 million to protect railroads and other transit, $350 million for better immigration checks, and so on—but Republicans blocked them all. Just before a final vote on the bill, however, Republicans and Democrats did agree on something: a massive, $2.9 billion package of drought and flood relief for Midwestern farmers. Emergency bailouts for farm states—which are represented by such Senate heavies as Tom Daschle of South Dakota and Charles Grassley of Iowa—have become a semiannual event on Capitol Hill. Last year, they passed $3.1 billion in drought relief. In 2002, the Senate passed $6 billion in unbudgeted emergency farm-state aid after having already passed a $180 billion farm bill that year. Three years earlier, the farm-aid payout was $8.7 billion. (To judge from the size of these bills, you'd think the Midwest was turning into another dust bowl.) Daschle claimed in 2002 to be "getting rid of these ad hoc disaster payment approaches"—and yet the ad hoc payments continue. And something makes us think that all these billions may not be getting the same penny-pinching scrutiny as funds for, say, rail security. But then, bragging about safer commuter trains doesn't have quite the same ring back in Des Moines or Kansas City as a huge handout for local farmers. ■

TNR.commentary

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

PROBLEM FROM HELL: There are increasing indications that our problem with the Iraqi security forces is not merely a problem with training and equipment but one of will. A potent rationale for many recruits to join the security forces is an unemployment rate estimated to be around 45 percent. For an untold number of recruits, the motivation isn't to rebuild and protect Iraq but to put food on the table. And you collect a paycheck whether you fight or not. An ominous sign is that the interim government refuses to release desertion figures.

Furthermore, even in a relatively calm city like Basra, many in the security forces are corrupt. As Knight-Ridder reports, the British forces occupying Basra are noticing a distinct problem with patrols on the crucial Shaat Al Arab waterway:

> "When the British forces watch, we catch the smugglers," said coxswain Matwok Drwesh, 37. "When they are not there, the smugglers go free for maybe a little money. Bribes are common."
>
> Drwesh, who said he didn't take bribes, claimed that corrupt senior officials routinely release arrested smugglers.
>
> "It's useless," Drwesh said. "Why am I bothering myself to catch the smugglers? It is a mafia."
>
> Other members of the Iraq River Police Service were almost as critical, agreeing that corruption in the force was widespread.
>
> "The corruption is not only in IRPS. It is many departments," said Majeed Sabar, 45. "I cannot worry about these matters because I cannot solve them."

The piece also reports that police officers are often simply insurgents with badges:

> "A lot of the boys have seen men in Iraqi uniforms shooting at them," said Capt. Benjamin Wilde, a British intelligence officer who's based in Basra. Radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's militants, he said, have benefited "from a degree of complicity with the police, undoubtedly."
>
> A spokesman for Iraq's Interior Ministry said he'd received no reports of police attacking British soldiers, but U.S. intelligence officials believe that some police officers in Basra secretly support al-Sadr.

There's no way of knowing how many in the Iraqi security forces are closet insurgents. But, right now, it appears that a lack of will among Iraqi forces is a serious problem, and one that risks crippling the best-laid plans of either George W. Bush or John Kerry. After all, the last time we faced a similar problem—a corrupt, often incompetent force of dubious political loyalty to the government—it was with our friends in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. And it ended in a catastrophe.

&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

KERRY HITS A TRIPLE: John Kerry's Iraq speech at NYU on September 20 is easily the best thing to come out of his mouth during the campaign. He did two things he had not really done before. First, he described the situation in Iraq in extremely blunt terms, ticking off the rising number of American casualties, the rising number of insurgent attacks, the ever-expanding list of "no-go zones" controlled by insurgents, and the deterioration in basic living conditions for ordinary Iraqis. Second, he connected these disastrous facts on the ground to specific miscalculations made by the president: the expectation that we would be greeted as liberators, the blithe unconcern about looting, the naïvely small number of troops we deployed for the postwar mission, the reliance on charlatans like Ahmed Chalabi, and the underinvestment in training Iraqi troops and policemen.

A few more details worthy of note: One, Kerry successfully broadened the character debate from empty attributes like toughness and resolution to critical attributes like judgment, competence, and honesty. He then connected the president's deficiencies in these areas to our failures in Iraq. ("[T]he only officials who lost their jobs over Iraq," Kerry complained, "were the ones who told the truth" about what it would take to win.) Two, Kerry led with his strongest critique of the administration on Iraq (i.e., it's a disaster that resulted from the president's wrong decisions) rather than with his less compelling procedural gripes (the failure to build a real coalition, to give inspectors enough time, et cetera), which he didn't mention until the end of the speech. The order of these criticisms was reversed as recently as Kerry's National Guard Association speech last week. Three, though the entire speech was well-focused, I was particularly encouraged by this Carville-like moment of lucidity: "And it makes the choice in this election clear: more of the same with President Bush or a new direction that makes our troops and America safer." Change versus more of the same—it really is that simple.

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Campaign Journal

Comeback?

BY RYAN LIZZA

FOR JOHN KERRY, September seems to be going about as badly as August. Nearly every national poll shows George W. Bush ahead. Recent state polls have shown Kerry's leads fading across many battlegrounds. Amazingly, one poll shows the race tied in what should be solidly Democratic New Jersey. Kerry hasn't been able to catch a break with the press, either. If August was dominated by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth attacks, in September, the news media have been obsessed with the slow-motion takeover of the Kerry campaign by new strategists and the fake-document scandal at CBS. Once jubilant, Democrats are now depressed.

But, as with every swing in momentum in this campaign, the new round of obituaries being written for one of the candidates seems premature. The week in which Kerry plummeted to his low point in the state polls may eventually be seen as the week he turned his campaign around. On Monday, Kerry went to New York University (NYU) and talked about Iraq. Advisers had previously suggested that Kerry would try to steer the debate toward domestic issues in the campaign's final weeks. Kerry's credibility on national security and terrorism had been badly damaged by the Swift Boat attacks and the Republican convention, and aides seemed desperate to refocus the campaign on meat-and-potatoes Democratic issues.

For a host of reasons, however, that plan seemed increasingly ridiculous. For one, recent jobs data is not dismal enough to make the economy the centerpiece of the campaign. Secondly, Bush's calendar included last Thursday's speech before the National Guard Association, Tuesday's address to the United Nations, and this Thursday's Rose Garden appearance with Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. Thirdly, the all-important first debate will be held on September 30, and, at the Bush campaign's insistence, it will focus on foreign policy and homeland security. Concentrating on domestic issues would have allowed Bush to portray himself as a capable commander-in-chief for the next week without challenge. Moreover, ignoring Iraq would have allowed Bush to continue to gloss over bad news from the region and to conflate the war in Iraq with the overall war on terrorism—two key elements of his campaign strategy. Finally, Kerry had to address what has been the Bush team's most successful criticism of him: that his positions, particularly on Iraq, shift with the political winds. Clearly, as his staffers like to say, Kerry had to turn his boat into enemy fire like he did in Vietnam and make a full frontal assault on Iraq.

DESCRIPTIVE RATHER THAN prescriptive, Kerry's NYU speech was perhaps the strongest and most effective he has delivered in this campaign. In simple, clear language, Kerry explained what is wrong with Bush's Iraq policy. Unlike Bush's address to the United Nations the following day, Kerry's speech was light on rhetorical flourishes and abstract ideals, and heavy on facts. The number of Americans dying in Iraq has increased each month since June. The CIA's National Intelligence Estimate directly contradicts Bush's claims about progress in Iraq. The number of attacks against American forces has quadrupled since March. Significant portions of the country have been declared "no-go zones" for Americans because they are controlled by insurgents. Security for Iraqis is worsening. Jobs are scarce. Electricity is rare. "That is the truth," Kerry said flatly. "The truth that the commander-in-chief owes to our troops and the American people."

He made a similarly matter-of-fact presentation about Bush's decisions in Iraq. Bush has offered multiple, sometimes conflicting, justifications for the war. "His two main rationales—weapons of mass destruction and the Al Qaeda–September 11 connection—have both been proved false," Kerry said. Bush never honestly explained the cost, in money and lives, of the war, and, when advisers—General Eric Shinseki, former chief economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey—told the truth, they were nudged out of the government. Postwar planning was dismal. Americans were not greeted as liberators. Ahmed Chalabi was not George Washington. Elsewhere in the world, the Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan, North Korea's nuclear arsenal has grown, and Al Qaeda has regrouped. Meanwhile, America's alliances have weakened. After laying all of this out, Kerry arrived at what has turned into a new stump-speech line: "Yet today, President Bush tells us that he would do everything all over again, the same way. How can he possibly be serious?"

The speech also succeeded in one of its major goals: differentiating the war in Iraq from the war on terrorism. Bush used his convention to conflate Saddam Hussein and the response to September 11, which helps him because his poll numbers are far better on terrorism than they are on Iraq. "One of the main reasons the president's numbers have gone up is that he has made a compelling case as to why the war in Iraq is part of the war on terror," says Republican pollster Whit Ayres. Kerry has finally started to untangle the two. "The most important thing we did was we put this front and center and de-linked it from the false association with the war on terror," says Kerry adviser Joe Lockhart. "Bush has dishonestly made this a part of the war on terror when it never was, and, in fact, it has harmed the war on terror."

The weakness of Kerry's speech lay in its prescriptions. The idea that he can cajole allies to replace American troops in Iraq, his most ambitious promise, seems fantastic. The rest of his plan—training Iraqi security forces, revamping the reconstruction program, and creating the proper conditions for elections next year—isn't revolutionary. Indeed, the Bush campaign immediately pointed out that the administration is

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pursuing that very course of action. But Kerry's case has little to do with these specific proposals, about which everyone agrees. Kerry's case is really characterological. After two years of incompetence, Bush simply can't be trusted to get these things right. "Iraq is a colossal failure for Bush," says Lockhart. "He's the one who has to defend his policy."

THE IMMEDIATE REBUTTAL to Kerry's speech from the Bush campaign was that Kerry had once again changed his position. Shortly after the speech, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan walked to the rear of Air Force One and told reporters, "Senator Kerry, today, continued his pattern of twisting in the wind with new contradictions and more confusion on one of the most critical issues we face." Bush repeated the line almost verbatim at two campaign stops. Kerry wants to make the race about Bush's record on the most important issue we face. Bush wants to make the race about Kerry's consistency. Part of Kerry's gamble on Iraq is that, by keeping stubborn facts front and center, the press won't let Bush get away with simply resorting to the flip-flop charge. One good test of whether Kerry's new offensive has really broken through, and whether Monday's speech was indeed a decisive turning point of the campaign, will be whether Bush is actually forced to talk about the substance of Kerry's attack.

But, even if he doesn't, Kerry's ability to change the conversation from Vietnam, document forgeries, and other peripheral issues to the specific negative facts on the ground might pay dividends. Indeed, the impact of simply putting this case before the public has been immediate. The gap between Bush's stump-speech rhetoric and the reality in Iraq has quickly become a central narrative in campaign coverage. That could make a huge difference. Bush's poll numbers have tracked remarkably closely to perceived success and failure in Iraq, spiking when Saddam was captured, plunging after the photos from Abu Ghraib were publicized, and spiking again after a convention that put a happy face on the war. To the extent voters are pessimistic about Iraq's future, Kerry can be optimistic about his.

Republicans argue that Kerry's record has left him unable to take advantage of the issue no matter what happens. "Senator Kerry's multiple and conflicting positions have undermined him as a credible alternative on Iraq," says Ayres. Maybe. But Kerry still has a chance to change this impression in the debates. It's harder for Bush to alter the facts about Iraq. Says a senior Kerry adviser, "To the extent the mess in Iraq is front and center in [voters'] minds, George Bush suffers." At least that's what they're hoping. ■

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Bush v. Bush on North Korea.

As I Say

BY J. PETER SCOBLIC

THE SPLOTCH THAT appeared on satellite photos of North Korea two weeks ago was like a Rorschach blot for foreign policy wonks. A cloud of smoke that would have been considered benign in almost any other country (it being in actuality just a cloud) was immediately feared the result of a nuclear explosion, showing just how anxious national security types have become about Pyongyang's weapons program. Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice had to reassure the Sunday morning talk shows that the North had not, in fact, tested a nuclear bomb.

Even if it had, the Bush administration's response probably would have been equally unconcerned. In September 2003, Powell said, "If they test, we'll take note of their test. ... The president has already accepted the possibility that they might test. And we will say, 'Gee, that was interesting.' " For his part, the president seems almost Buddha-esque about an increasingly aggressive and atomic Pyongyang. When a *New York Times* reporter asked him last month if he was concerned about the possibility that North Korea might have six to eight nuclear weapons, Bush simply turned up his palms and shrugged.

An odd reaction from a man who vowed that "[t]he United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons"—and who rarely fails to remind supporters that, "when the American president says something, he better mean what he says." But, when it comes to North Korea, the president seems to have meant very little of what he has said. In numerous speeches and documents, the administration has laid out a security strategy. It holds that weapons of mass destruction in the hands of rogue states and terrorists are the most serious threat we face today, that those threats should be preempted, that rogue states should not be bribed to comply with their international commitments, and that the United States will deal with them unilaterally if necessary. Yet, in his dealings with the Hermit Kingdom, Bush has abandoned each of these precepts, one after another.

"*By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.*" So Bush said of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea in his 2002 State of the Union address, extending the war on terrorism to rogue states. He and his advisers, of course, believed that Iraq required particular attention, and continually argued that,

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because of his weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein posed a special threat. In a major speech he gave in Cincinnati on October 7, the president himself made the case, calling the threat from Iraq "unique."

Yet, three days earlier, the administration had learned that Saddam wasn't unique at all. On October 4, North Korean diplomats admitted to Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly in Pyongyang that they had a uranium-enrichment program. Had the president been serious about confronting proliferation, this revelation should have immediately shifted the administration's focus from Iraq. Not because the North Koreans might build a uranium-fueled nuclear weapon (the program was only in its early stages), but because the program foreshadowed the death of a 1994 agreement with the United States that froze North Korea's other, much more dangerous, nuclear facilities: a reactor in the town of Yongbyon, 8,000 spent fuel rods from that reactor, and a facility for reprocessing those rods into plutonium, which can also be used to make nuclear weapons. If North Korea reopened those facilities and reprocessed the fuel rods, it would have enough plutonium for six nukes in six months. In comparison, according to a National Intelligence Estimate released that month, unless it acquired fissile material from abroad, "Iraq probably would not be able to make a weapon until 2007 to 2009."

But, while continuing to forecast Iraqi mushroom clouds, the Bush administration was not moved to address the North Korean threat. Just the opposite. With intelligence that was sure to raise questions about the wisdom of invading Iraq, the administration decided to keep Pyongyang's admission from the Democrats—at least for a while. After all, Congress was scheduled to vote the following week on whether to authorize the use of force in Iraq. So it was that Joe Biden, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, learned of the North Korean revelations on October 17, just two hours before the press did, and Tom Daschle, then the Senate majority leader, had to read about it in the papers the next day. By that time, the White House had its Iraq war resolution in hand.

Over the following months, the White House did everything it could to prevent North Korea's uranium program and the dissolution of the 1994 pact from being seen as a "crisis," going so far as to reprimand reporters who used the term. As the situation deteriorated, the administration engaged in champion understatement. When the president was first asked about the uranium-enrichment program, he called it "a bit of troubling news." When North Korea announced on December 12, 2002, that it was restarting its nuclear facilities, National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack called the move "regrettable." And when, on New Year's Eve, North Korea kicked out International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors who were monitoring its nuclear facilities, and later announced its intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer called the developments "disappointing" but "no surprise."

"The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action." When you've laid out this case for preemptive action, as Bush did in a June 2002 speech at West Point, treating a rogue state's rapidly accelerating nuclear weapons program as a matter of marginal importance requires some intellectual contortion. One of the most curious side effects of pooh-poohing the North Korean situation was that the proudly hawkish Bush administration began to sound rather dovish. Just days after the uranium program became public, the president reassured Pyongyang that "the United States has no intention of invading North Korea." He later said, "I believe this is not a military showdown; this a diplomatic showdown."

Seeking peaceful solutions to crises is, of course, admirable, but Bush's tack had a crucial flaw: It ignored the symbiotic relationship between force and diplomacy—the importance of which should have been manifest in late 2002. After all, it was the credible threat of U.S. force that convinced Saddam to readmit weapons inspectors that November. But, even as Bush threatened war if Iraq did not comply with inspections, he did nothing when North Korea actually expelled IAEA personnel. As one senior administration official later acknowledged to a *New York Times* reporter: "I admit there appears to be more than a little irony here. But Iraq was a different problem, in a different place, and we had viable military options."

That suggests we had no military options in North Korea. But in truth, the threat of force played an important role in resolving the last North Korean nuclear crisis, which was sparked in 1993 when the IAEA demanded special inspections at two suspicious nuclear facilities. As negotiations over IAEA access to the sites made fitful progress, the Pentagon beefed up its forces in South Korea, sending batteries of Patriot missiles, Bradley fighting vehicles, and Apache attack helicopters. That buildup encouraged the North to compromise. Robert Gallucci, who led the American negotiating team, says the threat of force was an "essential" component of Washington's strategy. "[The North Koreans] started looking at this, I'm pretty sure, and didn't like what they saw—and they shouldn't have, because we were actually doing things that would help us be in a better position to launch a strike," he says. Joel Wit, another American negotiator, learned that workers at North Korean hotels were "sleeping with guns underneath their pillows because they thought there was going to be an American attack." Indeed, President Clinton was prepared to authorize the deployment of 50,000 troops to the region, and he considered a strike on Yongbyon. Had the North Koreans begun to reprocess the spent fuel rods—thereby crossing one of the administration's "red lines"—Gallucci believes Clinton would have ordered an attack.

By contrast, there's no sign Bush has seriously considered military action. Though Powell and others insist that all op-

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tions remain "on the table," Kelly acknowledged in July that the Bush team has not defined red lines of its own. Certainly, it did nothing in April 2003, when the North Koreans announced they had reprocessed their spent fuel rods. To be sure, there is the very real risk that even a targeted strike on Yongbyon would escalate into a full-scale war with horrific casualties. But, by foreclosing even the *threat* of force early in the crisis, Bush gave away his biggest stick. (Gallucci calls the move "plain dumb.") He also lost an opportunity. At this point, a strike would be ineffective, because it's unclear where the plutonium from the fuel rods is. It could still be at Yongbyon, but it could also be in a cave somewhere in the North Korean countryside—or on a ship bound for the United States.

It is difficult, to say the least, to square the administration's pacific attitude toward North Korea's nuclear activities with its ostensibly muscular approach to foreign policy. Preventing North Korea from reprocessing its fuel rods was a classic example of the need for the preemption Bush preached. But, instead of taking "the path of action," the administration has gone to the other extreme, adopting the very policy Bush said was untenable post–September 11: containment. In his West Point speech, Bush said, "Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies." North Korea was a case in point, having exported missile parts and technology to Pakistan, Iran, Libya, and others. It would be foolhardy to believe North Korea might not do the same with nuclear material. But, since North Korea now has two dozen more kilograms of plutonium, the administration has been reduced to closely monitoring the country's trade and trying to interdict its ships. Despite the flimsiness of this strategy—the grapefruit-sized sphere of plutonium needed for a weapon could easily slip through the U.S. net—containment has actually become the preferred strategy of many administration hard-liners.

'People say, 'Well, are you willing to talk to North Korea?' Of course we are. But what this nation won't do is be blackmailed." Besides military action and containment, the administration's other option has been diplomacy, Bush's stated preference. But engaging in give-and-take with North Korea had one serious flaw: It was the approach Clinton pursued. Bush vowed that he would not pay off a dictator as he felt his predecessor had done. It is difficult to understate the influence Clinton-avoidance has had on the administration. Indeed, aside from an Iraq fixation, it is the only explanation for Bush's North Korea policy. According to Jack Pritchard, who served as both Clinton's and Bush's special envoy to North Korea until August 2003, the policy was "ABC—Anything But Clinton. ... If it looked or smelled or quacked like it was a Clinton policy, then the hair on the back of their neck went up."

This meant that, while the Bush administration said it wanted a diplomatic end to North Korea's nuclear program, it didn't actually want to negotiate with Pyongyang: Bush insisted there would be no "quid pro quo," no trading carrots for compliance. The result was that, for 20 months, nothing happened. For three months after the North admitted to the uranium program, the Bush administration simply refused to talk to Pyongyang. Then, in January 2003, the White House said it would be willing to talk, but not negotiate, with the North about how that country could "meet its obligations to the international community." Bush did suggest that, if North Korea eliminated its nuclear programs, he might address the North's demands for a nonaggression pact and normalized relations. But, when American negotiators met with their North Korean counterparts, they would not define the U.S. offer or budge from their insistence that North Korea denuclearize first. Not surprisingly, little progress was made.

But this June, under pressure both from its allies and John Kerry, the Bush administration suggested that, if North Korea agreed in principle to forgo its uranium and plutonium programs, it would agree to the resumption of oil shipments that had been cut off in 2002. Furthermore, once the North declared its nuclear facilities and prepared to dismantle them, the United States would draft security assurances, discuss lifting sanctions, and survey the North's energy needs. In the end, the North's facilities would be dismantled, all nuclear material would be shipped out of the country, and relations between the two countries might be normalized. This step-by-step approach, testing North Korean intentions and providing incentives for progress, is prudent—but it's also very Clintonian.

'I assure you, I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries." Bush says this at nearly every campaign stop. But, when administration officials are asked exactly what progress they have made with North Korea, given that the country now has enough plutonium both to fuel its own small arsenal and to sell some to Al Qaeda, they all give the same answer: The negotiations are multilateral, involving not just the United States and North Korea (as was the case during the Clinton administration) but also China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. This, they say, gives the talks greater force.

It's a rather process-oriented accomplishment for a president who said, in his 2003 State of the Union address, "In all of [its nonproliferation] efforts, ... America's purpose is more than to follow a process—it is to achieve a result." But the strangest thing about the Bush team's pride in its multilateralism is that, contrary to Bush's reassurances, it has effectively put U.S. security in the hands of other countries. China, for instance, has different interests from the United States, yet the Bush administration has insisted on using Beijing as its mediator in the talks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, China now increasingly sides with North Korea to pressure the United States, making Bush's decision to conduct only multilateral talks seem distinctly disadvantageous. Then again, little about the administration's North Korea policy seems to have been anything but. ■

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Why the GOP loves Don King.

Only in America

BY JASON ZENGERLE

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

FOR MOST PEOPLE, one Don King is more than enough. But for the 100 or so Republican donors who have gathered for lunch at Madame Tussauds wax museum in Times Square on the penultimate day of the GOP convention, there evidently is no such thing as too much Don King. So, as the famously flamboyant boxing promoter—wearing a black suit festooned with Bush campaign buttons and grasping two tiny American flags; his hair, as always, defying the laws of gravity—perches at a lectern at the front of the museum's banquet room, a wax figure of King—outfitted in a snazzy tux and clutching a giant cigar; its gravity-defying hair just so—stands to his right. The wax Don King, of course, is mute. The real Don King, of course, is not.

"Why do I love George Walker Bush?" King asks in the same bombastic yet mellifluent tone he uses when he's holding court before a prizefight. "Let me count the ways." King, like so many others singing the president's praises this week, cites Bush's resolve in the war on terrorism and the fact that "he says what he means, and he means what he says." But King is not here to pay tribute to Bush in the normal fashion; he has a more unusual explanation for why he, as an African American, loves the president. And, as is King's wont, he spells it out in superlatives: On matters of race, King tells the almost all-white crowd at Madame Tussauds, "George Walker Bush exemplifies a new day in Republican thought and attitude."

King cites Bush's religiosity as an African American trait, marveling, "I've heard George Walker Bush say that we are all God's children. I thought I was in the black Baptist church!" He touts No Child Left Behind as a sign of progress, reminding his audience that, during the time of slavery, "It was punishable by death for a white person to teach a black person how to read or write." And he praises the symbolism of having African Americans like Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell, as well as Rod Paige and Alphonso Jackson, serving in high-level posts in the Bush administration, exclaiming, "George Walker Bush had the daring, the bold audacity, to put them shiftless, worthless, no-account blacks at the head of state!"

Then King, who fancies himself a history buff (his speech this day features digressions on the Boston Tea Party, the abolitionist movement in Illinois, and the rise and fall of the Free Soil Party), tries to put Bush and his efforts on behalf of African Americans into perspective. "If you compare George Walker Bush to what we've done come from, from the tough road we've done come from," he says, "from the Bilbos, the Talmadges, the Maddoxes, ... the Jesse Helms', the Strom Thurmonds, ... and the Governor George Wallaces, who said 'segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever' "—King pauses for dramatic effect—"George Walker Bush is like Mother Teresa!" It is an odd selling point—Vote for Bush: He Never Threatened a Black Man With an Ax Handle—but the Republican donors don't seem to mind. When King's speech is over, they rush to get his autograph and have their pictures taken with him. "God bless you, Mister King," says one matronly white woman with blonde frosted hair and a syrupy Southern accent. "I'm so glad you're George Bush's promoter!"

Indeed, King is more than Bush's promoter; he's the president's highest-profile African American surrogate in the 2004 campaign. Earlier this year, King—along with Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairman Ed Gillespie and a handful of black Republican elected officials—headlined the RNC's African American Economic Empowerment Tour, which courted black voters in Cleveland, Detroit, Miami, New York, and Philadelphia. And, at the Republican convention last month, King seemed to be everywhere—attending donor breakfasts and lunches and late-night delegate parties one moment; giving interviews to Fox, CNN, and talk-radio hosts the next—always chanting, over and over, "George Walker Bush! Four more years!" Now, as the election nears, King plans to stump for the president at black churches across the country. "I'm going to campaign like never before!" he pledges.

And, if that weren't enough, he's giving the Republicans cash, too. Although King showered $250,000 on the Democrats' efforts to take back the House of Representatives in 2000, the promoter has recently started steering the bulk of his campaign contributions to the GOP. Last October, he donated $2,000 to the Bush-Cheney campaign and $17,500 to the RNC; and, in January, he gave the RNC another $25,000. King has also pledged to raise in excess of $500,000 for the Republicans in this election cycle.

King's boosterism on behalf of Bush and the GOP has, for the most part, been greeted with eye rolls and chuckles. (And there is something admittedly hilarious about listening to King shout, "[I]n Ed Gillespie you can hear the word of Jesus cry, 'I've been anointed to deal with the problems of the poor!' ") But the strange-bedfellow relationship between King and the GOP is no laughing matter. For one, by publicly embracing someone like King—whose personal and business practices make his good friend Al Sharpton look like a choirboy—the Republicans have revealed the inept, desperate, and morally bankrupt nature of their approach to racial politics. What's more, the relationship raises serious questions about what King is getting from the GOP in return for his rhetorical and financial support. Because, as King himself once said in response to a question about why he didn't donate the proceeds from one of his prizefights to charity, "Ain't nobody does anything for nothin'."

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Although George W. Bush received only about 9 percent of the black vote in 2000, Gillespie has said that increasing that share is a "top, top priority" for the GOP, and some Republicans say they hope to win 25 percent of the African American vote in this campaign. As evidence of their seriousness about increasing their share of the black vote, Republicans point to King's role in the Bush campaign. "Don King is a great promoter," says RNC spokesperson Tara Wall, "and we believe that he's able to carry the Republican Party's message to the African American community."

But there are reasons why King—despite a long history of providing financial support to politicians—was hardly ever called upon, prior to this election, to offer his rhetorical skills on the campaign trail. Most basically, King isn't a terribly effective *political* spokesperson. His logorrheic speaking style—part Jesse Jackson, part P.T. Barnum—obviously works when talking up a fighter; but King's verbal gymnastics are so over the top and convoluted that, when he's promoting a politician, he only makes that politician seem ridiculous. To wit: "George Walker Bush for four more years will give us giant strides in upward mobility and the direction of our great nation that will enable us to sit down at the table of brotherhood and sup together, as King would say, Jew and gentile, Italian, everyone that comes from every race, color, community, and religion." Certainly King's support for Bush hasn't helped so far: According to a CBS/Black Entertainment Television poll in July, only 10 percent of black registered voters supported the president.

Then there's the not-so-small matter of King's past. In 1967, King, then a 35-year-old numbers runner in Cleveland, Ohio, was convicted of manslaughter and sent to prison for stomping to death a man who owed him $600 on a bet. (It wasn't the first time King killed someone: Twelve years earlier he had shot a man to death; prosecutors ruled the killing "justifiable homicide" since the victim had tried to rob one of King's gambling houses.) After getting out of prison in 1971, King supposedly went straight, becoming a boxing promoter and quickly rising to the top of his profession. But boxing is a notoriously sleazy business, and King has spent much of his business career in court. In 1984, he was indicted by Rudolph Giuliani, then a U.S. attorney, on 23 counts of filing false income-tax returns and tax evasion. And, in 1994, he was indicted again—this time on nine counts of insurance fraud for allegedly bilking Lloyd's of London. King beat both charges, but he hasn't fared as well in some of the more than 100 lawsuits he's faced from boxers, managers, and fellow promoters who claim he's cheated them, paying out an estimated $25 million in settlements over the past three decades.

For a candidate and a political party that have attacked an anti-Bush group for hiring felons to canvass voters, and have gone out of their way to distance themselves from supporters tainted by scandal—former Bush friend and contributor Ken Lay is persona non grata in the GOP thanks to the Enron scandal and a federal indictment—you'd think Bush and his fellow Republicans would be wary of getting too close to someone with such a checkered past. But, with Republicans so desperate for a prominent African American supporter, they're apparently willing to look the other way in King's case. "He hasn't been convicted of anything," says the RNC's Wall when asked about King's business practices. As for his manslaughter conviction, Wall is philosophical. "He served his debt to society," she says. "We believe in redemption."

But, if the Republicans' motives for cozying up to King are clear, what are King's reasons for supporting Bush? King claims he's in the GOP camp because he believes in the president—"He's the man with the plan," King says—but others, particularly those who have dealt with King in the boxing world, suspect ulterior motives. "The one word that describes Don King best is 'opportunist,' " says Pat English, an attorney for Main Events, the boxing promoters. "He's always acted consistently in his own self-interest. I don't see why that would be any different in this case."

Indeed, King has a history of strategic political giving. In the early '80s, after realizing the FBI was investigating him for tax evasion, King began lobbying Ohio's Republican Governor James Rhodes for a pardon of his manslaughter conviction. A pardon would mean that, if King were convicted of any charges stemming from the current investigation, he wouldn't have a felony on his record to be held against him in the sentencing. In addition to lining up support from a number of Cleveland politicos and civic leaders, King, according to Jack Newfield's investigative biography, *The Life and Crimes of Don King*, made several campaign donations to Rhodes. And, in January 1983, Rhodes—who had only six days left in office—did indeed pardon King. After the pardon, King hired Rhodes's son as a consultant.

So what does King want from Bush and the Republicans these days? The most popular theory revolves around pending legislation that would try to clean up professional boxing by creating a national commission to oversee the sport, which is currently regulated only at the state level. The brainchild of Arizona Senator John McCain, the national boxing commission would establish uniform national standards for the sport. As such, it would have a severe impact on King's business practices. It would entrust the ranking of fighters to an independent panel of boxing writers and experts instead of leaving them to the hodgepodge of independent boxing associations, which have proved susceptible to alleged blandishments and bribes from King and other promoters over the years. It would stop unfair and coercive contracts of the type that King has used to secure the promotion rights for fighters in perpetuity. Most importantly, it would be the sole licensing body for the business—meaning that, if King ran afoul of any rules, the commission could revoke his right to promote fights in the United States; as it stands now, if King's license is revoked in one state, he can simply take his business to another.

Which is why King, while saying he supports regulatory reform, has vehemently opposed McCain's legislation. Last

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year, he wrote a letter to the Senate Commerce Committee—which was holding hearings on the bill—stating his concern "that a federal agency might affect the entrepreneurial spirit of boxing." And, in recent years, King has made numerous campaign contributions to Nevada Democratic Senator Harry Reid—including a $50,000 donation to Reid's political action committee in 1999—who worked to block the bill. (Reid has said that he only talked once to King about the boxing bill, but people on Capitol Hill, including McCain, have charged that, in opposing the bill, Reid was acting on behalf of King and other promoters.) Earlier this year, however, McCain and Reid cut a deal, and the bill passed the Senate. It's now sitting in the House, where some boxing observers believe King hopes his new Republican friends will kill it. "I'm sure that Mister King, who's well-known for his philanthropy, has only engaged in the political process for altruistic reasons, but I also know of his opposition to the boxing bill," says McCain, "which we're having some difficulties with in the House." King, for his part, says he has never mentioned the boxing bill to Gillespie or Bush. "It's another contentious, negative casting of aspersions for anybody that do good," he insists.

There's also speculation that King's support for Bush could have something to do with his efforts to sell a piece of property he owns in Florida. In 1999, King and his wife bought a jai alai arena and the 54 acres it sits on in Palm Beach County for $6.25 million with the hopes of turning it into a world-class boxing venue. But King's big plans never came to fruition, and now he's trying to sell the property for $30 million—possibly as the site of a new stadium for the Florida Marlins baseball team. And, since such a stadium would almost certainly require public financing, some speculate that King has supported Bush as a way to curry favor with—or at least gain access to—his brother Jeb, who is Florida's governor. "There's a lot of talk that this is about getting Jeb Bush to approve a deal to build a baseball stadium on that land," says King's biographer, Newfield. "It would be just like King: He's brilliant, and he's always thinking six moves ahead." Indeed, when he ran into Governor Bush at a fund-raiser for the president in Palm Beach in January, King tried to sell him on the stadium deal right there. "On two occasions, he said, 'I will support it if it's done right,' " King told *The Palm Beach Post*. "This is great news."

Finally, there's the possibility that, as someone who lives under the constant threat of federal investigation, King views his high-profile support of President Bush as a talisman of sorts. "I think he's supporting Bush because it helps for him to have a good relationship with the president and therefore, he hopes, the Justice Department," says Thomas Hauser, the boxing writer and lawyer who, in the early '90s, represented Joseph Maffia—King's former chief financial officer and a key government witness in the insurance-fraud case against King. "Maybe Don's supporting George Bush because he thinks that Bush is fighting a brilliant war on terror, and he agrees with the president that no child should be left behind, and on down the line. I'm not inclined to think so."

"What they can't conceive, know, imbibe, or digest is maybe this brother ain't doing nothing wrong." It's after King's speech at Madame Tussauds, and all the Republican donors have left the banquet hall. But, even with a crowd of just one, King is still performing as he answers my questions about the theories his critics offer to explain his support for Bush. Still, King is in a forgiving spirit. He magnanimously excuses his two old foes McCain and Giuliani—whom he'd watched speak at the convention two nights earlier from Gillespie's box—for condemning him as a scourge on boxing (in McCain's case) and trying to put him in prison (in Giuliani's). The two men, King tells me, are simply victims of "the consumption of negative publicity" that has resulted from the campaign of "condemnation, vilification, character assassination" he has endured for being an example of "black success." He still has "love and respect," he assures me, for their "human spirit."

Indeed, as King talks for more than an hour, it seems he has love and respect for everyone—even the Democrats. King, who pointedly calls himself a "Republicrat," tells me that, while he may be in the Republican camp at the moment, he has nothing against the other party. There's Al Sharpton, for instance. "I love Sharpton!" he exclaims. "It's great for us: Can you imagine two street urchins from the ghetto? Al Sharpton over there with Kerry if Kerry should win, Don King over there with George Walker Bush. We've got a voice on either side of the aisle!" And then there's Kerry himself. "I love Senator John Kerry," King insists. "He's another veteran, fought for my country, gave me the right to have free speech and be able to say what I'm saying."

All of King's love and respect, in fact, brings to mind one of the most famous stories about the boxing promoter—one he often tells about himself. In 1973, King, who was just then starting in the boxing business, attended a fight in Jamaica between the heavyweight champion Joe Frazier and George Foreman, the challenger. King had come to Jamaica at Frazier's invitation, but, in the days before the fight, away from Frazier's view, he also managed to befriend Foreman. On the night of the fight, King arrived at the arena with Frazier in the champion's limousine, which had its own police motorcade. When the fight started, he was sitting ringside near Frazier's corner. But, as King recounted years later to *The New York Times*, "[T]he first round, George hit Frazier with a devastating punch that sent Joe leaping into the air. Every time he'd strike Frazier, I'd move closer to the end of the row, toward George's corner. By the time the fight ended, a second-round TKO, I was on George's corner. When the fight was stopped, I'm into the ring, saying to George, 'I told you.' And George said, 'Come with me.' He took me to his room. Same thing. Motorcycle cops. Sirens blasting." The point of this story, according to King? "I came with the champion and left with the champion." It's a story that King's political allies would do well to keep in mind. ■

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Bush v. *Gore*, Round 2.

Rematch

BY JEFFREY ROSEN

IT'S NOVEMBER 2, and the presidential election looks close in Ohio. An army of lawyers are dispatched by the Bush and Kerry campaigns to scour all 11,614 precincts in the state for any hint of voting irregularities. Within hours, both sides have filed competing suits in state courts challenging the standards for counting provisional, absentee, and military ballots, as well as for the use of different voting machines. Within days, Laurence Tribe and James Baker are filing petitions to the Supreme Court, arguing that *Bush* v. *Gore*—the case that decided the 2000 election—compels the justices to intervene. The justices, who once confidently predicted that *Bush* v. *Gore* would have no effect on future elections, are horrified. Even the *Bush* v. *Gore* dissenters are shocked at the mess the decision has created. After all, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg called *Bush* v. *Gore* a "one-of-a-kind case" as recently as February 2003 in a speech to San Diego law students, adding optimistically, "I doubt it will ever be cited as precedent by the court on anything."

Unfortunately, the hopes that *Bush* v. *Gore* would fade from memory like an embarrassing dinner guest have proved to be wildly mistaken. And, if the election is close, the nightmare scenario described above seems all too likely to come to pass. During the four years since *Bush* v. *Gore*, the case has emboldened political candidates to file a tangle of litigation challenging election procedures in federal and state races—from the recall of Governor Gray Davis in California to the replacement of Senator Robert Torricelli in New Jersey. Moreover, in response to the legalization of politics that has followed *Bush* v. *Gore*, Democratic and Republican legal SWAT teams have been assembled to challenge the results of the 2004 presidential election if the vote in any state proves close enough to provide the margin of victory in the electoral college. And, even if the presidential election is not close, *Bush* v. *Gore* will continue to haunt congressional and local elections in November and beyond. "You could have dozens or even hundreds of cases filed on the Wednesday morning after the election," says Jack Goldsmith of Harvard Law School. "Given the litigation opportunities in *Bush* v. *Gore*, you could have real, real uncertainty for many weeks and months, not only about national elections but about local elections. And it's likely to get worse."

BUSH v. *GORE*, you may recall, stopped the manual recounts in Florida during the last presidential election for two reasons. Seven justices held that Florida's failure to adopt uniform standards for recounting "undervotes"—that is, ballots on which no vote was clearly registered—violated a novel and previously unrecognized constitutional right: the right of each ballot to be counted in precisely the same way. Because five justices thought there was no time to conduct a uniform recount, they said none could take place. But, because they also failed to define precisely what kind of equality they thought the Constitution required, their opinion seemed to be tailored only to decide the 2000 presidential election. Three justices also said that the decision by the Florida Supreme Court to change the standards for recounting ballots violated Article 2 of the Constitution, which assigns control over presidential elections to the state legislatures.

Throughout U.S. history, of course, close elections have been followed by litigation. But *Bush* v. *Gore* has exponentially increased the legalization of politics. "There's no question that *Bush* v. *Gore* has made courts more open and sensitive generally to claims about voting breakdown," says Robert F. Bauer, who is coordinating postelection legal challenges as national counsel for the Democratic National Committee. The decision has been cited in more than 30 lower court opinions during the past four years and invoked in challenges to nearly every close election.

Moreover, *Bush* v. *Gore* has made candidates far more aggressive in preparing for litigation. To contest the Florida recount in 2000, Democrats and Republicans assembled legal teams on the fly. By contrast, in anticipation of a protracted legal battle this November, both the Bush and Kerry campaigns have made elaborate preparations. The Bush campaign plans to have party lawyers in every state, including more than 30,000 precincts. And the Kerry campaign has set up an unprecedented national legal network involving more than 10,000 volunteer attorneys who are already preparing litigation over voting machines, voter registration rules, and questions over which ballots are counted or disqualified. "Every counting rule in every one of the key states is already in a binder," says Bauer. "All of the background work has already been done so we don't have the scramble that inevitably occurred in Florida."

What's striking about the legal strategies of the Bush and Kerry SWAT teams is how much they plan to rely on *Bush* v. *Gore*, which turns out to be an inexhaustible font of rhetoric and novel lawsuits. The first set of possible challenges involves claims similar to those at the heart of the Florida mess in 2000—arguing that each individual voter has the right to have his or her vote counted in precisely the same way. When the Court invented this right in *Bush* v. *Gore*, it was hard to fathom what the justices had in mind, since the claim that each state had to have uniform voting

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standards was impossible to reconcile with local control of the electoral process, where there is enormous variation among voting technology, hours of poll access, and rules about the disqualification of ballots.

But the fact that no one knows what *Bush* v. *Gore* means is an invitation to litigation. For example, the Help America Vote Act, passed by Congress in 2002 to avoid another Florida debacle, requires states to allow voters who claim they have been wrongly denied access to the polls to cast "provisional ballots," whose status will be adjudicated later. Citing *Bush* v. *Gore*, among other authorities, the Democratic National Committee is already supporting suits in Florida and Missouri challenging state officials' decisions not to count provisional ballots unless they are cast in the voter's home precinct. Ohio, another swing state, initially announced that it didn't plan to count provisional ballots cast in the wrong precinct, but Ohio's secretary of state recently changed his mind. His office expressed concern, however, that 88 Ohio counties have developed 88 different systems for determining which provisional ballots should be counted. Under *Bush* v. *Gore*, any variation in the treatment of provisional ballots between counties could provoke a flurry of challenges.

And challenges to provisional ballots are only one of any number of possible postelection lawsuits alleging that individual ballots are being treated unequally. In John Ashcroft's 2000 race against Mel Carnahan's widow, for example, the polls were kept open in some precincts beyond the statutory closing time—and, as Elizabeth Garrett of the University of Southern California has noted, the decision was questioned under *Bush* v. *Gore*. This year, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge has expressed concern that a terrorist attack might disrupt the election. If an attack were to shut down polls in one part of a state but not another, would the courts allow the election to be extended? No one knows. And, of course, if there are calls for manual recounts in any of the battleground states, there could be a repeat of the Florida debacle, since many states have not heeded the Supreme Court's suggestion to adopt uniform standards for identifying voter intent during a recount.

THE RIGHT TO have every individual ballot counted alike is the first category of challenges *Bush* v. *Gore* has spawned. But soon after the decision came down, a second category of lawsuits began citing the decision for a very different principle: Variation in voting technology disadvantages minority groups. Since *Bush* v. *Gore*, scholars have established that optical scanners have a lower error rate than the punch-card machines prevalent in urban areas that contain large numbers of minority voters. And lawsuits challenging the use of punch-card technology have been filed in California, Georgia, Florida, and Illinois (where, in 2002, a district court cited *Bush* v. *Gore* for the first time in questioning the use of punch cards). In the forthcoming presidential election, there are pending lawsuits over punch cards in swing states like Ohio. The suits are unlikely to be resolved before November 2, which means that the use of punch cards could be grounds for litigation after the fact if the election is close.

Finally, there is a third category of possible *Bush* v. *Gore* challenges in cases where courts or local officials have changed election procedures. In *Bush* v. *Gore*, three justices—William Rehnquist, Antonin Scalia, and Clarence Thomas—insisted that the Florida Supreme Court's decision to change the standards for manually recounting ballots violated Article II of the Constitution, which they said gives the state legislature exclusive control over electoral arrangements in presidential elections. Making a similar argument, New Jersey Republicans challenged the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision to allow Frank Lautenberg to appear on the ballot as a replacement for Torricelli, even though New Jersey law was ambiguous about whether ballots could be changed if a vacancy occurred fewer than 60 days before an election. In November, if either the presidential election or any congressional election results in a state court decision setting the electoral rules, these decisions might also be challenged along the lines that Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas suggested.

And, whether or not the presidential election is close, one lawsuit may well loom on the horizon. On November 2, Colorado voters will consider an initiative that would allocate the state's electoral college votes proportionally among Bush and Kerry—rather than awarding all of them to the winning candidate. If the initiative passes, it's likely to be challenged as a violation of the state legislature's prerogative to determine election procedures.

IT IS EASY to blame the justices who joined the majority in *Bush* v. *Gore* for their hypocrisy in radically accelerating the legalization of politics. Scalia, for example, opportunistically joined Justice Anthony Kennedy's opinion, which held that Florida's failure to adopt uniform standards for manual recounts violated the equal protection of the law. But Scalia can't really believe this, because, in the rest of his jurisprudence, he has repeatedly denounced the dramatic expansion of litigation that results from attempts to apply the vague commands of the equal protection clause to contested elections.

In an important case just last April, Scalia wrote a plurality opinion arguing that partisan gerrymanders—that is, cases where the majority in a state legislature draws an electoral map for the specific purpose of protecting its own incumbents and minimizing the strength of its opponents—should not be subject to judicial review. Because challenges to partisan gerrymanders have produced a great deal of litigation with unpredictable results, and because judges have been unable to agree on how to determine if a gerrymander is partisan, Scalia wrote, the issues should be regarded as "political questions" to be regulated exclusively by legislatures, not courts. Of course, if Scalia applied the same standard in *Bush* v. *Gore*, he would have agreed with Justice Stephen Breyer that it, too, was a "political question" to be

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resolved by Congress rather than the Supreme Court: The justices in the majority couldn't agree on a coherent standard for identifying equal protection violations, and, as a result, lower courts have produced a confusing set of competing standards that threaten to tie elections in knots.

The litigation provoked by *Bush* v. *Gore* also shows how wrong Scalia was to insist in 2000 that only the U.S. Supreme Court could save the country from the activism of the Florida Supreme Court. In fact, both Congress and the Florida state legislature were ready to step in if given the chance. If the Supreme Court had made clear in 2000 that all electoral disputes should be considered "political questions" to be decided by political bodies rather than lower courts, then it would have saved the country from the litigation mess that now menaces all future elections.

But it would be wrong to criticize conservatives alone for having turned our national elections into legal feeding frenzies. Democratic lawyers and scholars who denounced *Bush* v. *Gore* were quick to invoke it after the California recount when it suited their purposes, and they will be quick to invoke it again in November if the election is close. Furthermore, Democratic justices have shown little hesitation about proposing intrusive judicial oversight of contested elections, even though the standards they suggest are as vague as those in *Bush* v. *Gore*. In the partisan gerrymandering case, for example, Justices Breyer, John Paul Stevens, and David Souter proposed three different standards for identifying unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering, even though none of them was able to define precisely how much protection for incumbents should be considered unfair.

Far from being an aberration, *Bush* v. *Gore* is the epitome of what Richard L. Hasen of Loyola Law School has called the third phase of electoral litigation. The first phase, in the 1960s, announced that "one man, one vote" was a constitutional requirement. Emphasizing the right to an equally weighted vote, the Court forced the states to create electoral districts with nearly equal numbers of voters. The second phase, which began in the 1970s, focused on the right to an equally meaningful vote. Declaring that certain electoral arrangements—such as at-large elections—might make it harder for minorities to elect representatives of their choice, the Court came close to declaring a constitutional right to proportional representation. And, when the Court stepped back from this precipice, Congress in 1982 created a federal right for minorities to elect representatives of their choice. This led to an unlikely alliance of GOP operatives and minority rights advocates who supported the creation of minority districts, effectively isolating Democratic voters in the South.

In response, the Court inaugurated in the 1990s the third phase of electoral litigation. In *Shaw* v. *Reno* in 1993, it declared that oddly shaped voting districts created for the benefit of minorities might be unconstitutional not because they violated the right to an equally weighted or equally meaningful vote, but because they sent a message to white voters that their concerns might not be taken seriously. The Court had difficulty defining precisely what was wrong with these districts, aside from the fact that they looked funny, and, for a decade, the borders of nearly every minority voting district in the country were considered tentative until Justice Sandra Day O'Connor decided whether their shape was so bizarre as to be unconstitutional. After reigning for a decade as aesthetic adjudicator of every minority district in the nation, O'Connor abruptly switched sides in 2001 and voted to uphold the North Carolina district that she had questioned in *Shaw* v. *Reno* eight years earlier.

As Pam Karlan of Stanford Law School has observed, *Bush* v. *Gore* is entirely consistent with *Shaw* v. *Reno*. Rather than focusing on the actual interests of individual voters, it is concerned with the message conveyed by particular electoral arrangements: In *Shaw* v. *Reno*, O'Connor said that "appearances *do* matter" in apportionment cases because minority districts could "reinforce the perception" that members of the same racial group vote alike. Similarly, the *Bush* v. *Gore* majority was concerned that different counting standards for different ballots might *appear* unfair even if they were designed to reveal the voter's true intent. But, as Samuel Issacharoff of Columbia Law School has observed, electoral messages are in the eyes of the beholder, which is why lower court judges and Supreme Court justices have been unable to agree about what vision of fairness a particular election should have to respect: Is it more fair to treat every ballot alike or every group of voters alike?

The unfortunate result is that every contested election in the country is now vulnerable to being resolved by O'Connor and her colleagues. And the fact that they attempted in *Bush* v. *Gore* to deny the obvious implications of their intrusion into the political process only makes their intervention more reckless. Did they really believe they could create a right to political equality without defining it, in an age when society disagrees so vigorously about what equality requires? Did they imagine for a moment that Democrats and Republicans would meekly tug their forelocks rather than use electoral litigation as a partisan tool? And did they think that courts could presume to recast themselves as election supervisors without calling their own impartiality into question?

Whether or not the presidential election of 2004 is close, *Bush* v. *Gore* will continue to distort and confuse U.S. elections more aggressively with each passing year. The disastrous consequences of the Court's decision to legalize U.S. politics have only vindicated the fears of Felix Frankfurter, who warned nearly 60 years ago of the dangers of judicial excursions into what he called "the political thicket." "It is hostile to a democratic system to involve the judiciary in the politics of the people," Frankfurter wrote. "And it is not less pernicious if such judicial intervention in an essentially political contest be dressed up in the abstract phrases of the law." Worst of all, having now led us into the political thicket, neither the conservative nor the liberal justices have any way of getting us out. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Adventurous Women

WHEN THE GODS CREated the film medium *something over a century* ago, they showered it with miraculous powers, but, sly as ever, they added a proviso. To keep the new medium aware of its limitations, they ordered that it continually produce adaptations of classic novels. Film obeyed. From then until today, the roster of such adaptations has kept growing around the globe. (In France, adaptations of *Les Misérables* are a minor industry: so far there have been more than twenty.) Once in a while, an adaptation escapes the gods' disciplinary intent and captures the tenor of the novel along with sufficient of its characterization and story—*Howards End* and *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance—to be a cause of cinematic pride. But most of the time, adaptations do the chastening that the gods wanted.

VANITY FAIR
(Focus)

ŽELARY
(Sony Pictures Classics)

Here now is Thackeray's **VANITY FAIR**, in its tenth screen appearance, adapted this time by Matthew Faulk, Mark Skeet, and Julian Fellowes, and directed by Mira Nair. Apparently Nair was the driving force behind the project. Born in India, as she vividly testified in *Salaam Bombay!* and *Kama Sutra*, she may have been attracted to Thackeray's book because he was born in Calcutta and because there are connections with India in his very English novel, connections that Nair has expanded.

But chiefly she took on the creation of England in Napoleonic days, and in one sense she succeeded. Nair peoples the screen with the life of the day. Every time a character moves through the streets of London or other places, he or she becomes part of a social organism. All around are dozens of other people, scurrying, quarreling, peddling, so intent on business of their own that, for a few moments anyway, the main character becomes part of a vast tapestry.

Also, many of the novel's characters are as well portrayed as the screenplay permits. Outstanding are Eileen Atkins as the vitriolic spinster Matilda Crawley, Jim Broadbent as the rich merchant Osborne, Jonathan Rhys-Meyers as his loftier-than-thou son, Gabriel Byrne (a pleasant surprise from this frequently unrewarding actor) as the Marquess of Steyne, and James Purefoy as the luckless Rawdon Crawley. But well acted though they are, these and the other characters are only sketches. As with so many adaptations of novels, we are *told* that Character A is a particular person because the novel says so, not because the film has shown it. (Which need not always be the case: see Emma Thompson's screenplay of *Sense and Sensibility*.)

The center of *Vanity Fair*, for those who will tolerate a reminder, is the career of Becky Sharp, who makes her way upward from mean beginnings to a post as governess and to various kinds of social success, including marriages. Her rise, said the critic Walter Allen, provides "a study of men and women as they actually had their being in society ... a marvelous panorama of upper-middle-class London life of the generation beginning about 1810." In its chief dynamics, however, it is a portrait of a woman's advance in a world owned and run by men. The film version gives us numerous glimpses of her career, but it is as if we were turning the pages of an album: the tissue between the glimpses is missing.

Even those glimpses could have been more effective if the actress playing Becky had enriched them. Nair's basic and incorrigible mistake was in the casting of Reese Witherspoon as Becky. Besides the fact that her face has a square-jawed quasi-brutality, Witherspoon has very little of Becky's texture—the sexy intelligence, the attractive bravado, the resolve to make the best of whatever comes along. Witherspoon is flavorless, so she emphasizes the screenplay's skimpiness instead of at least partially redressing it.

Add that Nair's sense of rhythm and drive sags badly. Long passages of secondary material are loaded on again and again (the scene at Steyne's dinner table, for example). And Nair has supplied an Indian dance number with Becky in it.

The subject of adaptation is a perennial at film-studies conferences. One frequent comment is that the film form is more akin to the novel than to the play. Arguably so: still, film takes on the task of making physically visible the characters whom the reader has privately made visible in his mind, and thus inevitably film also takes on some of the responsibilities of drama. Tough going, most of the time, for a screen adaptation to fulfill the functions of both the novel and the play. The gods knew what they were doing when they imposed novel adaptations on film as a stricture.

From the Czech Republic comes **ŽELARY**, the story of a quite different adventurous woman. Set during World War II, it is drawn from an autobiographical novella—by Květa Legátová—and its basis in fact gives the film a special tang. The heroine, Eliska, is a nurse in Prague, a sophisticated young woman who is working for a medical degree. We learn that she is a member of an underground resistance group. Soon the group is greatly endangered—one of them is killed—and Eliska is ordered to flee Prague, go to the mountain village of Želary, and, for complete concealment, marry a peasant who has already agreed. Because of the risks to herself and others, she too agrees.

The film gradually alters from the exciting thriller of its opening to become a drama of cultural change. The sophisticated young woman is now immersed in peasant life—local arguments, local superstitions, local wisdom, and so on. This social contrast between city life and a

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backward village—a contrast explored in some recent Iranian films—is of course entwined with her new married life. (The simple and patient husband, played by György Cserhalmi, is in fact a more appealing person than Eliska, played by Aňa Geislerová.)

The director, Ondřej Trojan, is moderately competent. The cinematography by Asen Šopov nicely mutes the colors to give the film an earthy look. But the tension with which the picture starts soon dissipates, the contrast between Eliska's background and her present place is lost, and the film plods into a tale of village life, spiced only occasionally with a hint of German threat. The finish, including some ironic actions by the liberating force, falls into place apparently as ordained by the original. But I found myself patient with the picture because of a weird nostalgia. It isn't necessary to forget the monstrosities of World War II in order to feel nostalgic nowadays for a war that was fought comprehensibly and with clarity of purpose. ■

Cynthia Ozick

And God Saw Literature, That It Was Good

THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES: A TRANSLATION WITH COMMENTARY
By Robert Alter
(W.W. Norton, 1,064 pp., $39.95)

IN THE THIRD CENTURY B.C.E., Ptolemy Philadelphus, ruler of Alexandria, Egypt's most Hellenized and sophisticated city, determined that a Greek rendering of the Torah should be included in the Great Library of that famed metropolis. To that end, he sent lavish gifts to Eleazar, the high priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, who reciprocated by dispatching to Alexandria seventy-two sages, six from each of the twelve biblical tribes, to begin the work of translation. Ptolemy greeted the visitors with a banquet lasting seven days, after which they were taken to the island of Pharos. Here each man was shut up in his own cell, in strictest seclusion, each toiling separately over the Hebrew original, in order to perfect its transcription into the lingua franca of the age. Seventy days later, when the scribes emerged from their labors, it was revealed that the seventy-two individually calculated translations were identical, each to the other, varying not by a jot or a tittle. Hence the name Septuagint (meaning seventy), immemorially given to the miraculous Greek text: a book divine in its essence, and thereby divine in its production. When heaven has a hand in translation, it is bound to be immaculate. God, who is One, sees to the oneness—the indivisibility—of His word. Many scribes, but one authentic Voice.

Thus the legend. Yet stripped of the sacral, it encapsulates the most up-to-date thesis concerning the nature of the Hebrew Bible: that it can, after all, be read as a unity, indivisibly, like any literary work. The contemporary idea of reading the Bible as literature comes after two hundred years of strenuous philological sorting out, the purpose of which was to unravel what tradition had always held to be a tightly textured whole. Scholars, minutely excavating linguistic layers and Ugaritic cognates, pulled out disparate threads, and identified each according to its purported source and time. Instead of one Author, there were now several: the J writer, for whom God bore the name Yahweh (the German philologists' J Englished to our Y); the E writer, who invoked not Yahweh but Elohim; the P writer, a priest, or circle of priests, absorbed by the formalities of cult and rite; and finally D, the Deuteronomist. But even for the unravelers, who had zealously quartered the singularity of Transcendence, there was a unifier. This was the unknown Redactor, who, shrewdly concealing the seams, had

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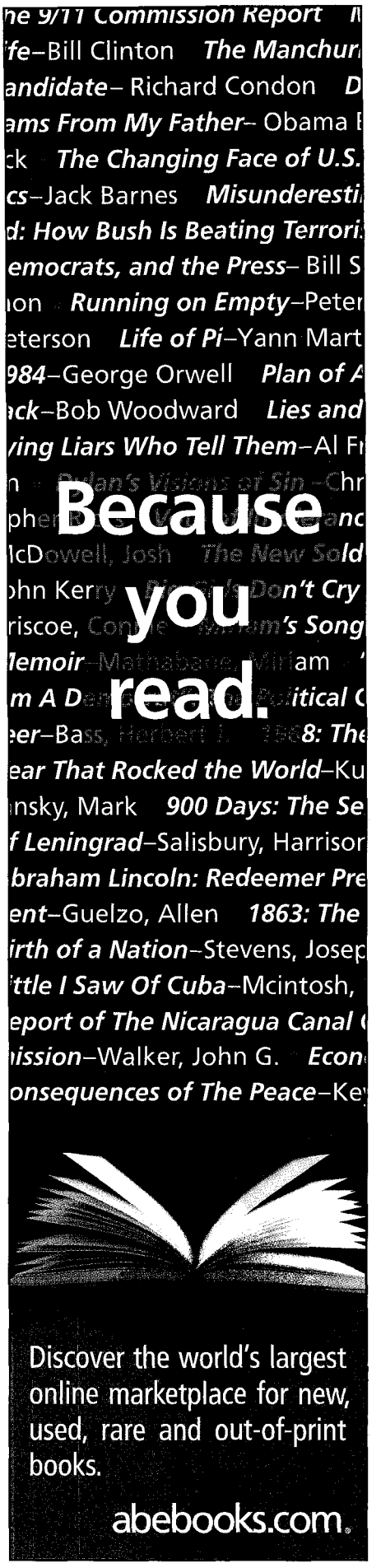

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spliced all four strands into canonical coherence. It was the Redactor whom the philologists sought to undermine. Below his work lay the multifaceted hidden truth.

For the ascendant Bible-as-literature movement—a movement, if it can sustain the term, confined mostly to university classes and those common readers drawn to Scripture for reasons other than pious belief—the Redactor returns not simply as an implied collator or pragmatic editor, but as a conscious literary mind, alert to every nuance of trope and type, whether verse or prose, from storytelling and the drama of character to national epic, from monotheistic grandeur to homely lentil stew. The Bible, then, can be read not for its authority (or not for its authority alone), but for its fastidious and deliberate art. But since Scriptural artfulness is also moral art, a potency of precept adheres to it nonetheless. The literary approach, writes Robert Alter, "directs attention to the moral, psychological, political, and spiritual realism of the biblical texts, which is a way of opening ourselves to something that deserves to be called their authority, whether we attribute that authority solely to the power of human imagination or to a transcendent source of illumination that kindled the imagination of the writers to express itself through these particular literary means."

The quotation is from Alter's volume *The World of Biblical Literature*, which appeared in 1991. Along with *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, and related earlier works, this can in retrospect be seen as the arduously analytical preparation for an undertaking of such ambitiousness that to call it uncommon hardly suggests how very rare it really is. "Ethical monotheism," Alter sums up, "was delivered to the world not as a series of abstract principles but in cunningly wrought narratives, poetry, parables, and orations, in an intricate patterning of symbolic language and rhetoric that extends even to the genealogical tables and the laws." And in the most succinct summary of all, he cites the Talmudic view: "The Torah speaks in human language."

HUMAN LANGUAGE, YES, BUT who would dare to render Scripture single-handedly, all on one's own? In fact, in the entire history of biblical translation, there have been only three daredevil intellects, each inspired by profound belief, who have achieved one-man renditions: the Latin of Jerome, the German of Luther, and the English of William Tyndale. Tyndale, who was burned at the stake for his presumption in desiring the Bible to be accessible in the vernacular, is generally regarded as the forerunner of, or influence on, the King James Version—a work that is distinctly a committee enterprise. Though Jerome and Luther each had occasional rabbinical consultants, and Luther was advised also by Melancthon, a Reformist scholar, their translations stand as monuments to the power of individual rhetoric and intent. Luther in particular impressed on German as inexhaustible a linguistic force as the King James Version left on English. In English, notably, all biblical translation since Tyndale's sixteenth-century version, without exception, has been by committee. Until now.

That is why Robert Alter's newly published Englishing of the Pentateuch can be called historically astounding: with a gap of four hundred years, it comes directly after Tyndale. It will be seen to differ from standard American translations, whether it is the Anchor Bible, or the Revised English Bible, or the Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh, or any other significant collective project that may come to mind. Though not without manifold influences and appreciations (the medieval Abraham ibn Ezra or the contemporary philological exegete E. A. Speiser), Alter aspires beyond erudition to the kind of sensibility that a reader might bring to James or Proust. In this he scarcely means to reduce the hallowed stature of the biblical narratives, but the very opposite. Close attention to "the literary miracle of the stories," he points out in an introductory essay, will emphasize and intensify the rhetorical ingenuities by which "the chief personages are nevertheless imagined with remarkable integrity and complexity as individual characters … growing and changing through long stretches of life-experience." At the same time, Alter reminds us, the Hebrew Bible, unlike the novel of character and personal vicissitudes, "has been shaped to show forth God's overwhelming power in history, exerted against one of the great ancient kingdoms, and the forging of the nation through a spectacular chain of divine interventions that culminates in the spectacle of the revelation on the mountain of God's imperatives to Israel." So it is no wonder that previous translators, trembling before the transcendent majesty of the Hebrew text, have huddled together in protective consultative committees.

In one striking case, the consultants have not been present at the table. Everett Fox, relying on the work of the German-Jewish luminaries Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, and adopting their approach of etymological mimesis—Hebrew roots cast as German roots—attempted a similar effect in English. Useful as a study guide and a trot, it is not quite what we mean by translation, if translation is taken to be the avoidance of awkwardness. Fox's awkwardness is purposeful: "YHWH will pass over the entrance,/and will not give the bringer-of-ruin (leave) to come into your house to deal-the-blow." (Exodus 12:23) Helpful though this may be to the beginning student peering into the Hebrew, it is scarcely normative English.

SO THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MODern singularity, post-Tyndale, remains open to Alter. Yet what he has undertaken is not an act of hubris; it is a work of conviction. His conviction is twofold: first, the unextraordinary recognition that all translation is of its time, steeped in an impermanent idiom, ultimately to be superseded by the more familiar lingo of ongoing generations. The language of the King James Version is poetically enthralling and rightly revered, but our daily tongues no longer traffic in "walketh"s and "shalt"s (and we may be impatient with its deliberate, if only occasional, christological inaccuracies). It goes without saying that the foundational document of our civilization, as the Bible is often termed, needs to be understood in the language of its period; the drive toward the vernacular that defines Luther, Tyndale, and the King James Version is as urgent today as it was then, and perhaps more so now, when scriptural references are alien to most undergraduates, and the majority of American synagogue congregations turn from the Hebrew text to the facing page, where the English translation resides.

If the necessity of contemporary usage were all that motivated Alter, he might have been content with the existing collective translations, despite their lack of stylistic force. But the second element drawing him to this mammoth work—he calls it "an experiment"—is the belief that it is precisely the discoveries of philological scholarship that have

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distanced readers through their preoccupation with lexical components and syntactical forms at the expense of insight, metaphor, tone, imagery, cadence, all spilling from the cornucopia of literary virtuosity. In short, the obstacle of philology's tin ear. Citing still another objection to contemporary modes of translation, Alter condemns "the heresy of explanation": as when, for example, the ubiquitous word "hand" (*yad* in Hebrew, a similarly strong monosyllable), a stoutly visual and flexible noun capable of multiple figurative effects, is "clarified" abstractly as "trust" or "care" ("And he left all that he had in Joseph's hands," Genesis 39:6).

Alter also faults the common reliance on subordinate clauses to avoid parataxis, the distinctive biblical repetition of "and ... and ... and." Here we may recall Forster's witty formulation, in *Aspects of the Novel*, of plot as opposed to story: "'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it." Biblical narrative will have none of this. A typical series of statements connected by "and" complicates, it does not simplify, the reader's comprehension; implied causality haunts the chain of events through rhythmic repetition directed, in the way of a musical composition, at the interpretive ear. The Bible is all plot, all causality: its substance derives, after all, from the First Cause.

In arguing for the Bible's literary status, or standard, Alter maintains that "the language of biblical narrative in its own time was stylized, decorous, dignified," yet was never "a lofty style, and was certainly neither ornate nor euphemistic ... a formal literary language but also, paradoxically, a plain-spoken one." And again: "A suitable English version should avoid at all costs the modern abomination of elegant synonymous variation, for the literary prose of the Bible turns everywhere on significant repetition, not variation." Finally, he insists that "the mesmerizing effect of these ancient stories will scarcely be conveyed if they are not rendered in a cadenced English prose that at least in some ways corresponds to the powerful cadences of Hebrew."

THIS, THEN, IS THE PRESCRIPTION: the task, the aim, the experiment Alter has set for himself. The heresy of explanation will be repudiated. The sound and sense of the original will be honored. Contemporary English will be employed, but not slavishly: "a limited degree of archaizing is entirely appropriate," he warns. And clearly Alter's vision includes the sweeping moral horizon that is the Bible's raison d'être. In addition, all this is to be accomplished while traversing vastly disparate regions of text and idea: the thematic and psychological Patriarchal Tales, the ritual instructions, the communal imperatives, and ultimately the pervasive assurance that the God of the Bible directs the course of history through an interdependent compact with humankind, and particularly with humankind's biblical stand-in, the nation of Israel.

Can Alter, working alone—*sans* colleagues, relying solely on his own instinct for the impress and idiom of two unrelated linguistic strands, as isolated in his toil as any of the fabled seventy-two—can he pull it off? One might as well begin before the beginning, with pre-existence, before there was anything. Here are the first four verses of the profoundly familiar King James Version:

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And now Alter:

> When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness.

What can be discerned in these nearly identical passages? A syntactical disagreement over the first word, *b'reshit*: does the particle *b'* represent a prepositional phrase ("In the beginning"), or a clause ("When God began")? Together with current scholarship, Alter votes for the clause. Where the King James Version introduces stops, breaking up the Hebrew into recognizable English sentences, Alter follows the uninterrupted flow of the original, subverting conventional English grammar, so that for a moment we are borne along with Joycean rapidity. For *ruah*, which can mean "breath" or "wind" or "spirit," Alter chooses "breath," the more physical—the more anthropomorphic—word. These in themselves are small and unsurprising innovations. What genuinely startles is the inspired coupling of "welter and waste," with its echoes of Beowulfian alliteration perfectly conjoined, in sound and intent, with the Hebrew *tohu-vavohu*. A happening of this kind is one translator's own little miracle; no committee could hope to arrive at it.

But Alter's choice of "hovering," and especially the evocative footnote it triggers, may possibly lead to a muddling of one of his salient principles of translation. "*Hovering*," Alter notes, "the verb attached to God's breath-mind-spirit, elsewhere describes an eagle fluttering over its young and so might have a connotation of parturition or nurture as well as rapid back-and-forth movement." There is nothing to complain of in this valuable footnote; quite the opposite. It deepens, it enlarges, it leaps to associative imagery in the intuitive manner of poetry, and it is one of hundreds of

THE MACHIAVELLIAN NEOCONSERVATIVES

Commentary

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equally illuminating glosses in a volume of more than a thousand pages. Nor are these copious amplifications all that Alter supplies for the sake of enriching the pristine text; besides the overall introductory essay, each of the five Books has its own prefatory exposition.

Leviticus, for instance, lacking appealing human characters and a story, is often classed as an arid collection of rites and legalisms. But after reminding us that "small Jewish boys were introduced to the Torah not through the great story of creation and the absorbing tales of the patriarchs in Genesis but through Leviticus," Alter drills through this off-putting customary view to a distilling insight central to understanding the Hebrew Bible. "There is a single verb," he tells us, "that focuses the major themes of Leviticus—'divide' (Hebrew, *hivdil*).... What enables existence and provides a framework for the development of human nature, conceived in God's image, and of human civilization is a process of division and insulation—light from darkness, day from night, the upper waters from the lower waters, and dry land from the latter. That same process is repeatedly manifested in the ritual, sexual, and dietary laws of Leviticus." And he concludes: "God's holiness, whatever else it may involve and however ultimately unfathomable the idea may be, implies an ontological division or chasm between the Creator and the created world, a concept that sets off biblical monotheism from the worldview of antecedent polytheisms." This is why tradition required little children to begin with Leviticus. Here Alter cites Rashi, a seminal exegete of the eleventh century: "Let the pure ones come and study the laws of purity."

In the light of Alter's declared opposition to "the heresy of explanation," what are we to infer from his vast and formidable critical engines? He has not chosen to publish his translation in the absence of embellishing footnotes and conceptual elaborations. He cleaves to interpretation; he does not eschew imaginative commentary; explication is zealously welcomed. Yet what is amply permitted outside the text is considered heresy within the text. This makes a muddle of sorts. Every translator knows, often despairingly, that accommodation must be allowed for, simply because the *ruah*—the spirit, indeed the respiratory apparatus—of each language is intrinsic and virtually unduplicable. Even when there are cognates (and there are none between Hebrew and English), the related words have their own distinctive character. In fact, not to accommodate can sometimes set off misdirection toward an implausible meaning.

Alter objects to the Revised English Bible's substitution of "offspring" for "seed" in God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:17): "I will greatly bless you and will greatly multiply your seed, as the stars in heaven and as the sand on the shore of the sea, and your seed shall take hold of its enemies' gate." (Both the Revised Standard Version and JPS's Tanakh give "descendants.") If selecting the stronger noun were the only consideration, there could be no demurral. "Seed" yields a concrete image; it is of the earth; it includes, in the most literal way, the generative function (semen, Latin for seed), and it denotes the multiplicity of generations. "Offspring" is clumsy, even ugly, and is as far from God's dazzling stretches of stars and sand as this morning's newspaper is from William Blake. The difficulty is that the contemporary reader's linguistic expectations, long estranged from biblical idiom, is more attuned to *The New York Times* than to "The Songs of Innocence"; and if seed is not readily understood to mean progeny, who can make sense of "his seed shall take hold of his enemies' gate"? ("His enemies' gate" may be bewildering enough: to capture a "gate," the approach to a city, was to subjugate the city itself.) Despite Alter's reasoned liking for "a limited degree of archaization," his purpose in bringing ancient Hebrew into American English is, after all, to decrease the distance between Scripture and our quotidian lives. A modicum of textual accommodation—Alter's "heresy"—may cause poets and sticklers to sigh; but there are instances when a sigh must trump a muddle. And if Alter did not believe in enlightening twenty-first-century readers, he would have given us a translation as bare of the interpretive luxuriance of his scholia as a tree denuded of its innate verdancy.

On the other hand, Alter's determination to replicate the original as closely as possible, while it will surely satisfy the sticklers, will do more than that for the poets. The poets will rejoice. Alter's language ascends to a rare purity through a plainness that equals the plainness of the Hebrew. To achieve this, he has had to come to a clear decision about the nature of English, with its two sources, or etymological strands: the florid Latinate and the spare Germanic; or call it Dr. Johnson versus Lincoln. The voice of Alter's Hebrew-in-English is Lincoln's voice, whose words and meter resonate in American ears with biblical gravity and biblical promise. It is in this plain-speaking, quickly accessible Anglo-Saxon prose, simple monosyllable following simple monosyllable, that Alter lets us hear God's imperatives, pleas, hopes, and elations:

> ... for the Lord shall turn back to exult over you for good as He exulted over your fathers, when you heed the voice of the Lord your God to keep His commands and His statutes written in this book of teaching, when you turn back to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your being. For this command which I charge you today is not too wondrous for you nor is it distant. It is not in the heavens, to say, "Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?" And it is not beyond the sea, to say, "Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?" But the word is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it. See, I have set before you today life and good and death and evil, that I charge you today to love the Lord your God, to go in His ways and to keep His commands and His statutes and laws.... Life and death I set before you, the blessing and the curse, and you shall choose life....
> (Deuteronomy 30: 9–19)

Alter's gloss looks past this passage to the kind of world that surrounded it:

> The Deuteronomist, having given God's teaching a local place and habitation in a text available to all, proceeds to reject the older mythological notion of the secrets or wisdom of the gods. It is the daring hero of the pagan epic who, unlike ordinary men, makes bold to climb the sky or cross the great sea to bring back the hidden treasures of the divine realm—as Gilgamesh crosses the sea in an effort to bring back the secret of immortality. This mythological and heroic era, the Deuteronomist now proclaims, is at an end, for God's

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word, inscribed in a book, has become the intimate property of every person.

To which we might add, a book that is "not wondrous" requires no sacred mysteries, no sacred mediators, no sacred hierarchies. All the same, God's commands, statutes, and laws are not easy; they are grounded in self-restraint. Seven of the Ten Commandments begin with "Do not." And insofar as the overarching vision of monotheism encompasses ritual, it is as "a battle against the inchoate," Alter argues. "Authorized ritual is in all respects the exact opposite of ecstatic orgy (another departure in principle from the pagan world)."

Remarks such as these—informational, historical, pedagogical—have a secularized socio-anthropological flavor so radically different in tone from the diction of the translation itself that we need to be reminded that Alter has crafted both. The text breathes out power and truth. The footnote is instructional. The one carries divine authority, the other carries ... what? The authority of a teachers' manual, perhaps, the kind with the answers at the back of the book. But if the Bible in all the purity of its expression is genuinely and wholly intended to be read as *literature*, its prerogatives will descend to the level merely of prestige: the prestige of literature, which, as Alter has already defined it, derives its authority solely from "the power of human imagination." Literary prestige, though, tends to have a weak hold on authority, as the immemorial shufflings of the canon show us; otherwise the work of Virgil would still be as revered today as it was when the Latin spelling, Vergil, was deposed in favor of its Marian echo. The necessity of Virgil diminished when he came to be seen as Vergil the poet, not Virgil the prophet.

THE NECESSITY OF THE BIBLE, if it is to be seen solely as poetry and story, may flatten in the same way. All sacred books contain the wise or stirring pleasures of narrative: the Bhagavad-Gita tells stories, the Taoist scriptures of Chuang-Tse tell stories, the Zoroastrian Zenavesta tells stories, the Koran tells stories, Confucius and Mencius tell stories, the Buddha tells stories; African and American Indian sacred tales abound. The earth is flooded with stories, hymns, and parables regarded as holy in their origins. The literary approach can deflate them all. Flannery O'Connor, an intransigent believer, said of the Christian mysteries that if they were not true, "then the hell with them." A skilled teller of tales, she insisted on a distinction between imagination of the kind that she herself could wield and what she took to be divine revelation. And it may be that if all the world's scriptures had long ago been flattened into literature, and packed side by side, despite their dissimilarities and divergences, into a single bookshelf—much as *Madame Bovary*, say, can stand in civil proximity to *Crime and Punishment*, and Joyce cheek by jowl with Proust—all our habitations and histories might have been far more pacific. Novels and stories do not war with one another; neither, *pace* Harold Bloom, do they always engage in supersessionism (at least not of the jihadist variety).

But stories, though they influence and enlarge us, do not deliver Commandments. The Bible cannot be pumped up from literary prestige to divine prerogative through arguing from the power of human imagination, even when that power is "kindled" by positing measureless structures of transcendent dominion. What, then, are unbelieving readers of the Five Books left with? Unless they happen to be moral philosophers who will deduce law and right conduct from reason, it is stories they are left with, and—for non-philosophers—isn't that enough?

On their face, the Patriarchal Tales, like all literature that endures, touch on everything recognizable in ordinary human life: crises between parents and children, between siblings, between husbands and wives; hunger and migration, jealousy and reconciliation, sudden ascent and sudden subjugation, great love and great hatred. Universally felt, they are family annals in a family album. The Joseph narrative is doubtless the most moving story of all: here stands Joseph, Pharaoh's mighty viceroy, interrogating the humbly petitioning brothers who in the past flung him into a pit and sold him to traders on their way to Egypt. Catching sight of Benjamin, the tender younger son of their mother Rachel, "Joseph hurried out, for his feelings for his brother overwhelmed him and he wanted to weep, and he went into the chamber and wept there. And he bathed his face and came out and held himself in check and said, 'Serve bread.' "

In this enclosed fraternal scene, God is not needed, and seems not to be present. So far, the drama of Joseph appears to resemble the stories we call literature; and yet it does not, because Joseph will not permit God to be exiled out of his world. When, bowing before Pharaoh's deputy, the brothers plead for forgiveness, Joseph is again swept into weeping, and invokes not only God, but God's design: "And Joseph said, 'Fear not, for am I instead of God? While you meant evil for me, God meant it for good.' " And further: "Do not be pained and do not be incensed with yourselves that you sold me down here, because for sustenance God has sent me before you ... to make you a remnant on earth and to preserve life, for you to be a great surviving group. And so, it is not you who sent me here but God." A few verses on, Joseph dies, at one hundred ten, and is embalmed according to Egyptian custom. And now, portentously, the Book of Genesis ends: "He was put in a coffin in Egypt."

That coffin signifies more than a human story. It is God's story: Egypt will become a coffin for the Hebrews until God redeems them. God in the Hebrew Bible is Causality, and Causality, unlike Joseph or Benjamin, cannot be a character in a tale—an assertion that has been broadly contradicted, or at least qualified, in formulations by both Harold Bloom and Jack Miles. In his winning and ingenious book *God: A Biography*, Miles is moved to ask, "How did all this feel to God?" and sets out to see Him as a "character who 'comes to life' in a work of literary art." Miles's God has an indelible, even a familiar, human personality, not unlike the mercurial protagonist of an epic, or an opera, or a labyrinth of motives by Henry James. And while it may be possible to transmute aspects of Scripture into literature by means of the fictive imagination—certainly Thomas Mann succeeded in turning the Joseph chronicle into a massive and masterly novel—finally Scripture itself rebels against it. Mann's fiction can claim no greater authority than writerly genius.

Just here is the nub and the rub of it: if the God of the Bible is not "real," then—in creative-writing-course argot—the Bible's stories won't and don't *work*. For the faithless skeptic or rationalist confronting Scripture (a category of modernity that includes, I suppose, most of us), there is nothing more robust to lean on than suspension of disbelief, the selfsame device one brings to Jane Austen. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley, salvational creations both, are not real; we believe in them anyway. Causality deserves better. Causality escapes the mere "comes to

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life" of character.

It is the directness and the consummate clarity of Robert Alter's rendering that forces this conclusion. The translator's richly developed notes and reflections are informed by scholarship, wit, and intuition; without the intrusions of didacticism, they educate. But the antique words, on their own power, and even in a latter-day language, draw us elsewhere, to that indeterminate place where God is not a literary premise but a persuasive certainty—whether or not we are willing to go there. ■

David Thomson
Follow the Money

DOWN AND DIRTY PICTURES: MIRAMAX, SUNDANCE, AND THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT FILM
By Peter Biskind
(Simon and Schuster, 544 pp., $26.95)

OPEN WIDE: HOW HOLLYWOOD BOX OFFICE BECAME A NATIONAL OBSESSION
By Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing
(Miramax Books, 432 pp., $23.95)

BLOCKBUSTER: OR, HOW HOLLYWOOD LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE SUMMER
By Tom Shone
(Free Press, 320 pp., $26)

MORE AND MORE, OUR response to movies becomes Pavlovian, instead of according to Pauline (Kael). We prefer being on or off, up or down, to reasoned argument. Why not? It's what we and the pictures have been demanding for twenty years. So Ebert and Roeper do "two thumbs up" or even "two big thumbs up." Every Monday the official numbers run in our newspapers, and they are so much easier to digest than the rather worldly and "amusing" reviews that still hold their place in Friday's paper. For how much longer? How many ordinary filmgoers even know the names of film critics in print? How many reckon that they are just "names" made up for the ads?

A telling thing happened to me recently. My son and I went to see *The Village* on its first Friday night at our local eight-plex. We were enthusiasts for M. Night Shyamalan; both of us loved *The Sixth Sense*, though we were disappointed by *Unbreakable* and *Signs*. We had hopes for *The Village*, sharpened by a sly television "documentary" called *The Buried Secret of M. Night Shyamalan*, and by the movie theater's decision to run *The Village* in its thousand-seat theater. But two hours later my son looked at me and said, "Well, that takes the 'y' out of Shyamalan." "Good night, Night," I agreed. We were speaking naturally in ad copy-ese.

But such ad lines (or in this case anti-ad lines) are the way we have been taught to think. Ten days later the grim numbers came in: *The Village* had a 68 percent drop-off from weekend one to weekend two. "Catastrophic" was the inside verdict. I knew earlier: on Saturday, I went back to the plex for the 11:25 a.m. showing of *The Manchurian Candidate*, and now it was in Theater 1 and *The Village* was off in some ignominiously smaller room. In two hours, *The Village* died amid weary laughter and dispirited booing.

You can track this grim progress in the publication of books on film, notably in Peter Biskind's latest book, which is a shrewd, fairly reliable, and moderately scandalous piece of business history by a journalist with dishy sources. Of course, Biskind's method risks losing those informants; to talk to him is to risk giving offense to the powers that be. His earlier book *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* provoked much outrage from its subjects, the young film-makers who came to the fore in the 1970s. They cried foul and unfair, but so far as I know no one sued and no public admissions of error were made. Biskind's great skill is in knowing the second-level employees and the ex-spouses to take to lunch, the ones with grudges, the ones who once narrowly missed a punch from Harvey Weinstein.

You can also see a development in Biskind's writing. Whereas *Easy Riders* grew out of a genuine admiration for many films of the 1970s, and a sense that it was piquant news if some of those film-makers behaved badly, in his new book he hardly bothers to assess the films themselves. The emphasis now is all on the bad behavior in a schizophrenic medium where money-grubbing and prestige-mongering go hand in hand in a way that might have been invented by Preston Sturges. (Preston Sturges was an American movie director of the 1940s, a great hit once, and maybe a genius, who believed the world was activated by principles of fraud, rascality, pretension, and excessive credulity.)

Which is to say, if Martin Scorsese, or whoever, desires a book saying that he is a great American artist, he may have to write it himself. Nearly everyone else writing about our movies has come to the conclusion that Scorsese's history is far too interesting and conflicted to be written off as art. What happens *to* a Scorsese project now seems more enticing than what happens *in* it. Directors have become employees again. Sometimes they are even fired!

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA, starting in the late 1960s, we had books that said, look, the movies are so terrific they may be an art form; or look, get a load of Orson Welles or Nicholas Ray or Alfred Hitchcock. We had books on genres and we had portraits of movie stars. Two years ago, we had a book about Walter Murch, one of the cinema's best editors and sound designers, in conversation with the novelist and poet Michael Ondaatje. It treated many matters in general, but it looked closely at the pulse, the structure, and the meaning of films such as *The English Patient* (from an Ondaatje novel) and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. It was an endlessly stimulating book, but it said nothing about the deals or the numbers. And so it was already a little out of date, for it breathed the air of art (or work, or craft, or creative dedication) for its own sake.

Go to the list of perhaps the most generous and persevering of film-book publishers—Faber and Faber in London—and you will discover not just countless biographical and critical studies, but a seemingly infinite series in which our leading film-makers talk about them-

David Thomson's new book, THE WHOLE EQUATION: A HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD, *will be published by Knopf in December.*

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selves, and not just in a self-serving or high-minded manner, but as if the aura of nobility was not too far away. This can grow oppressive, especially if you have spent some time watching real film-makers on the job. They are tricky, compromising, and ruthless. And the auteur theory—and its larger hope, the unsullied adoration of film-makers—can easily conclude that Orson Welles, say, was a great genius constantly beset and victimized by crude rogues of commerce, when in fact he was a strange, narcissistic self-destructive who was his own worst enemy and who regularly queered his own chances at art by being unable to sit down with the sources of the money without insulting them.

You can make an interesting argument that real art—in any art form—should never sit down with the sources of the money. But then you have to find some other way of explaining a whole legion of film-makers who made a lot of money and had no shame or embarrassment about keeping expert track of it. That line would include Alfred Hitchcock, Frank Capra, Billy Wilder, and Steven Spielberg. Come to that, it would include you or me (if we were film-makers), for most of us take immense care over what happens to our money. So it's all the more humanly entertaining when some of those moneybags acquire a wondrous way of talking about what they have done. And nothing is more beguiling than their realization that "it" can't be put into words. Movie-makers don't always know the right words. As Biskind teaches us, they say "fucking this" and "fucking that" as much as they can, to show that they aren't clerical, verbal fusspots.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THE SENsation of the movies was so intense and widespread that no one saw a need for mediation or commentary. The audience of the 1920s, the 1930s, and most of the 1940s was so steadfast in its habit of going to the movies that no one saw much need for persuasion or elucidation. At the same time, few places in American society were impressed with the European notion that the movies might be a medium capable of art. In Hollywood, earnest talk of "art" was a more serious handicap than "Red ties." The American movie was as phenomenal as extreme weather; it was a sudden habit in Americans' use of time, a giddy business and a means to absurd fame; and it was an inadvertent arm of empire—the largely false portrait of a hysterical light and happiness in which Americans might be tanning themselves.

That impact was far more comprehensive than the mere benevolence of "art." Art, after all, is a decoration on the ordinary life: the gentleman connoisseur may read Henry James before breakfast, and drop in on the Bonnard show at lunchtime, and attend a performance of Schubert's lieder in the evening. His soul may be replenished and soothed. He has had his 500 milligrams of vitamin A for Art. But during his regular day he may steadily offend the regulations of the SEC, screw his mistress and his maid, consign his elderly mother to a shabby rest home in Poughkeepsie, and steal taxis from cripples—all of this while carrying on like Cary Grant. After all, he has the power and the right of choice that comes with cultivation. Yet there are forces and climates in our life so much less decorative, so much more prevailing. They alter our ways of thinking so profoundly that we hardly recognize the loss, or the shift. Weather is such a thing, and so are movies, television, the computer, the telephone, bathrooms, automobiles, gambling, the loss of collective memory. We do them all very well, with our cultivated and ever-replenished souls. If you feel this is a little sour, just ask yourself how many hours of your education, or your children's education, were devoted to the onslaught of television, as a new language, as a mediator of reality, as a pretty thing. We expect correct spelling and grammar; we do (we still do, right?) hours and years on words. Yet we hardly know the structures in visual language.

Television had surpassed, or historicized, movies before the notion of film art reared its head in *The New York Times*, American academe, or the plans of publishers. But in the 1960s, like a shy Kong, that monster began to stalk the streets of the city. The influence of young French critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif* began to find English-language disciples. The golden days of Hollywood were reassessed (and television played its part, for that's where the young saw so many of the classics). Some masters of the old code, people who would have died rather than own up to their art, yielded to the new hero-worship. With varying degrees of bewilderment, belated vindication, mounting arrogance, or sheer opportunism, they accepted that they might have been artists. Of course, in doing so they had to forget doing it all with other people's money and studio space, with a score of brilliant craftsmen and a few idiotic yet charming movie stars; they even forgot the audience ready to swallow nearly anything. They agreed—humbly (Welles), gruffly (Hawks), mincingly (Hitchcock), exultantly (Nick Ray), sardonically (Billy Wilder)—that, yes, maybe they were artists. In which case, they deserved as many devout books as Charles Ives, Edward Hopper, or Nathanael West. Or more.

BUT IT IS AN INTRIGUING AND useful question whether an art movie, or even an artistic picture, has ever been made in the United States. I mean apart from the experimental, personal, and private gestures of self-expression that reach from Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage to ... Mel Gibson. In the matter of feature films made for an audience, there have been odd discrepancies in "independence," artistic autonomy, or sheer isolation (a state that can extend from wealthy monomania to amazing poverty). Which of these was the most independent or artistic venture: D. W. Griffith on *Birth of a Nation*; David O. Selznick (only the producer) on *Gone With the Wind*; Orson Welles on *Citizen Kane*; Charles Laughton on *The Night of the Hunter*; Michael Cimino on *Heaven's Gate*; or Francis Ford Coppola on *The Godfather*?

For about $100,000, Griffith was transforming the theatrical potential of a medium and organizing the basics of a new storytelling, while aligning it with gross melodrama and worse (so that now we feel obliged to ban the landmark). Probably no film has made more money on its investment, or startled such a proportion of the public. Selznick, hiring and firing directors as he plunged deeper into obsession and gambled ever more recklessly (largely on borrowed money), made the picture that Hollywood reckoned its greatest, and which is still accounted the all-time box-office champion. Offending nearly everyone in pictures, owing to his infamous carte blanche contract, Welles took a studio's money and said, effectively, "Don't disturb me until I'm finished." The result was a well-reviewed flop and a picture that is now monotonously hailed as the best movie ever made, so that it begins to overawe the future of film. Laughton, sixteen years later, with less money than Welles, attempting to coordinate talents as large and diverse as Stanley Cortez, Robert Mitchum, and Lillian Gish, to say nothing of the haunting novel by Davis

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Grubb and a prolix script by James Agee, made a picture that was nearly a laughingstock—but which is now treasured as a great American film. Cimino largely ignored budget, schedule, and the commonsense business dismay of United Artists (an honorable enterprise) and made a rogue movie that destroyed the company but may one day be regarded as both magnificent and monstrous. And Coppola? He was a hired hand, often in danger of being dismissed for inexperience, but he took a mainstream project and made a huge hit, a modern classic, a deeply personal statement about family.

The flux of circumstances on every production, and the chaos of the work in which the contemplative, searching, inward auteur needs to deal with the questions or the complaints of a hundred idiots and enemies every day while maintaining the openness that hears the one remark loaded with promise—this is not like making art in any traditional sense. These artists, if that is what they are, do not live alone in silence and sublime concentration. Nor is the moviemaker doing it for its own sake, or for self-expression. He is making a picture to open at Christmas for millions of people. He has big non-aesthetic responsibilities. He is surrounded by moneymen trying to restrain their anxiety. He wants rewards, money, a better life, Oscars, glory. He may pick up a bigger house, a new wife, and expensive habits.

All this certainly applies to many of the "auteurs" I have just discussed. The least vainglorious was Charles Laughton, who had been taken up by a young, ambitious producer named Paul Gregory to pursue the dream he had been timid about admitting: to make a whole film as beautiful and moving as the paintings Laughton collected. And when he failed (as Hollywood insisted he had done), he gave up. Known as the player of tyrants, outcasts, and geniuses—Captain Bligh, Rembrandt, Henry VIII, Quasimodo—Laughton had the least confidence and the most neurotic shame about himself. He really was an artistic soul, a natural loner, whereas most of the others were towering egotists and unbridled showoffs. This is show business, after all.

Now, the films just discussed were not ordinary but extreme. In budget, epic scope, imaginative reach, or violent assertion of genius, they were outstanding—and they all ran into some trouble on that account. It is never easy to make a movie, you may claim, and I would agree, even if some film-makers from Buñuel to Hawks make it look easy, natural, or sweet. But many movies were done with fewer cries of outrage or anxiety. And some of those relatively tranquil efforts by more or less cheerful slaves to the system may be not just superior works, but the best fruit of the American system. Consider this top ten for American talking pictures: *Morocco* by Josef von Sternberg; *My Man Godfrey* by Gregory La Cava; *The Shop Around the Corner* by Ernst Lubitsch; *Daisy Kenyon* by Otto Preminger; *Notorious* by Alfred Hitchcock; *The Lady Eve* by Preston Sturges; *In a Lonely Place* by Nicholas Ray; *Midnight* by Mitchell Leisen; and *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, and *To Have and Have Not* by Howard Hawks. Very well, that's eleven—and all in black and white, so quaint now, so antique, that it is old masterish.

THE YEARS BETWEEN 1930 AND 1950, from *Morocco* to *In a Lonely Place*, were rich hours for the American moviegoer. There were more movies per week then than there are now, and with half the population. But the "literature" on movies consisted in a handful of true critics (a few of them were very good, such as James Agee, Manny Farber, and Otis Ferguson, often in these pages), and of course the dreams and din of fan magazines and movie gossip, the smokescreen that has made movie history so uncertain. The real books were few and far between.

Not until the late 1960s did the retired and mordant voice of Josef von Sternberg give utterance in *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*, his acerbic and comically self-serving memoir as well as a window into his strange, bitter romanticism. It was the start of a film library, to be followed by dozens and then hundreds of studies in genius. The books served the new college courses, and they secured tenure for the new generation of film professors. It was not long before the discipline—always striving for respectability—bought into the racket of structuralism. Learned articles were written on films, and never mind that the surviving film-makers could not follow a sentence of the texts! This semiotic density has lately gathered at the University of California at Santa Barbara, a weird clash of sun and signs that would have tickled Sturges, and fulfills Pauline Kael's gloomy fear that if there was anything that could kill the movies, it was academic attention.

Kael is crucial to this story in many ways. She was the best-known spearhead of the way that talk about film became staple fare, in the late 1960s, for what the English call the chattering class. She was also someone fiercely determined to defend the pop nature of film—its energy, its vulgarity, its distinct territorial grip on something not hitherto known as Art. As Louis Menand put it in an essay on Kael, "[*New Yorker* readers] needed to believe that it was possible to enjoy the movies without becoming either of the two things *New Yorker* readers would sooner have died than be taken for: idiots or snobs." It is a valuable observation, for the best American movies do have a relaxed smartness that seems to say, well, surely anybody with a mind could get this, and like it. And for several decades more or less anyone did get it and like it, and this in turn encouraged those afraid of Art and the academy to think that that they could be usefully entertained. It may be that useful entertainment will prove America's unique creation, one of its greatest gifts to the world.

There is another point to be made about Kael. She went to Hollywood. She was invited to Hollywood by Warren Beatty, and she and Hollywood didn't click, which was hardly a surprise. But Kael had smelled the business side of pictures enough to guess that it was vital—to see that its flux and the pondering over what to film and how to film it were inseparable. You couldn't really judge a movie without knowing why and how the picture came out the way it did. The new generation of film critics and professors (many of them raised as literature students) hated this, because they had been taught that you could take a sonnet or a sonata and analyze it as if it were a bubble in the clear and unattached air. To this day, I know estimable film critics who do not like to talk to film-makers or even to go to Los Angeles.

Back at *The New Yorker*, chastened or chilled, Kael let fly with the essay "Why Are Movies So Bad? Or, The Numbers," which was inclined to the view that it was next to impossible for Hollywood to produce anything of value. So it was by 1980, but so it had always been. Hollywood was a factory and a counting house; its leaders were scoundrels, fools, and worse. The lowest common denominator pressed on everything. And yet it had produced the eleven films I listed above, and several hundred more that are still worth seeing, still sharp, funny, and fresh. A lot

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of worthwhile things in life are difficult.

Over the years, a few books pioneered the attempt to know what Hollywood felt like—to follow the money. In the early 1950s, the reporter Lillian Ross sat in on the making of John Huston's *The Red Badge of Courage*. But was the picture John Huston's, or was it Gottfried Reinhardt's (the producer), or Louis B. Mayer's (the studio boss), or was it a studio property? Ross didn't spend much time on the numbers, but she reported the way the bosses talked, since she was allowed to be in the room. (Hardly anyone has had that privilege since.) The talk was clumsy, profane, egotistical, ugly, crude—and lotsa fun. Ross's book, *Picture*, is still a model of its kind, and so accurate that Hollywood took fright. And there were other creditable efforts—John Gregory Dunne's *The Studio* (about Twentieth-Century Fox), David McClintick's *Indecent Exposure* (about the cronyism that muffled the David Begelman scandal), and Steven Bach's *Final Cut*, all the more valiant and eloquent in that Bach had been one of the top executives at United Artists responsible for hiring Michael Cimino to do *Heaven's Gate* and then drawing it closer to hell's portal.

IN THEIR TIME, THOSE BOOKS were best-sellers—but still the thrall of auteurism held for years more. Until, that is, Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, which crystallized the new interest in "inside Hollywood" material and anecdotes. Television had been hacking that mud patch to hell for years with *Entertainment Tonight*, and in *The New York Times* Aljean Harmetz had pioneered an excellent line of studio reporting, a task now shared by several writers and as likely to appear in the business section or even the front section as in the arts pages. And now, I think, one can see a wave of books that are prompted by the public's new fascination with the film-as-business genre.

Along with Biskind's new book, which treats Sundance and Miramax (or Robert Redford and the Weinsteins), there is also *Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession*, written by Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing, two writers at *Variety*; and the forthcoming *Blockbuster: Or, How Hollywood Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Summer* by Tom Shone, once the film critic on London's *Sunday Times* but now resident in America and clearly crossing over to the business side. These books are lively and proficient. They are determined to show that they have a good new answer to the question of what makes movies work, whereas in truth they are simply catching up with the old answer, or part of it.

The change in movie economics, which these writers do not really note properly, is that today's big numbers come from very much reduced theatrical audiences. Indeed, not many pictures would flourish any longer if they had to get their money back in American theaters. What has rescued them is the mounting importance of "foreign," or the sale of American films abroad as part of the Americanization of the world. And if you want to look for underlying reasons why that world is now so dismayed with America, consider the impact of all these American films that are only brash, youthful, pointless, and so stupid as to be depressing. Once upon a time, our films stood for the attractiveness of America: maybe people here really were as casually witty, as merrily intelligent, as Myrna Loy and William Powell. It was so damn cool you wanted to be there.

What is striking (and so disturbing) in these books is the uncritical tone of this business history. Hayes and Bing and Shone seem to say that the way things are going is not just natural, but admirable. It's a business, after all. You feel that these writers are gently trying to prove their suitability for a studio job. But the gelding of film criticism is part of the larger failure to stand up and denounce the wretchedness of what this complacent business is churning out.

Another way of saying the same thing, or conveying the sense of a hole opening beneath one's feet, is the story that Budd Schulberg tells about his novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* When it was first published, in 1941, Hollywood read it as a nasty satire by a boss's son who had been to Moscow and learned to despise Hollywood. Sammy Glick, its protagonist and young wanna-be, was a toad on the way to becoming a shark. In more recent years, however, Schulberg has been approached by people who wanted to film Sammy. "Now self-confident young men come up to shake my hand because 'I learned so much from your book; it helped me get ahead—the more I read the more I wanted to be Sammy.'" Sammy Glick, a hero!

BISKIND'S BOOK IS BETTER BECAUSE his focus is narrower, and because he has a point of view. He is a longtime observer of the film scene, and he has a chilly instinct for discovering the worst in people. He goes to the heart of so much Hollywood indecision in seeing that "independence" is one of the most vexed or fallacious concepts of our day. Biskind has made a very effective page-turner by telling the story of Redford's Sundance Film Festival, the heaven and hell of the indie movement, and the way in which the Weinstein brothers seized upon the new mood and imposed their own rather old-fashioned idea of a film studio on it. Why not? Harvey Weinstein grew up as a great admirer of David O. Selznick; and so there are two pretty good studios in

Listening to Shahram Nazeri

I know the horses keep galloping for miles.
I know the ants keep lifting their feelers to heaven
And planning new triumphs, but it's already too late.

When Nazeri sings, I don't care if the Second
Adam comes down or not; I don't care if my words
Get you to cry or not—it's already too late.

The smell of coffee spreads out from the fire.
The wild-haired old women sing over the coffin.
Go on complaining and praying. It's already too late.

I know sweet vowels and inescapable rhythms.
I know how sweet it is when a young woman is here
And the old men think of God; but it's already too late.

My tongue never becomes bitter because my mouth
Keeps holding the grief pipe between my teeth.
Go on and conquer bitterness; it's already too late.

Here I am; I am all alone. It's early morning.
I am so happy. How can so much grandeur
Live beneath my skin? Go on asking;
It's already too late!

ROBERT BLY

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existence in America today, Miramax and HBO.

Biskind on Robert Redford is flat-out baleful, though not as comic as he might have been. Though he once played Jay Gatsby, Redford has become as crass as Tom Buchanan, but there is no need to concoct grief over that. Anyone looking like Redford, anyone as glorious as he was in the late 1960s and 1970s, and anyone who can edge the Sundance festival toward the Sundance merchandise catalogue is a chump, dazzled by his own mirror and begging for satire. Biskind explains convincingly that Redford is passive-aggressive and woefully muddled, but he never admits that the man is not very bright and, worse, horribly afraid of being made a fool of. Does the handsome image really deter Biskind from the mockery that Nathanael West might have found in such a figure, and that was strongly suggested in *The Way We Were* in the manner in which Streisand's character stroked the stuffed beauty of Redford's vacant face?

The man Redford played in that film, Hubbell Gardiner, says in a story, "He was like the country he lived in. Everything came too easily to him." Once, maybe, but not lately. Today Redford is all too painfully available as a metaphor for movie-star (or American) clout at a loss over what to do. He is sixty-seven, struggling to keep some vestige of his looks (above all in the way he is photographed), with these lamentable recent credits: *The Claim*, *Spy Game*, *The Last Castle*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, *The Horse Whisperer*, *Up Close and Personal*. Whether he is acting or directing, these films are full of a moony self-idealization devoid of all character and interest. You have to go back to *Quiz Show* to find a compelling picture—and Biskind makes plain how thoroughly (and dishonestly) Redford tricked that project away from his own Sundance protégé, Steven Soderbergh.

WHAT A CONTRAST THIS anemic egocentricity makes with Harvey and Bob Weinstein, a pair of brothers who sometimes seem in competition over which one of them is the bad cop and which one the worse. I suspect that what prompted Biskind toward this subject was the chance to write about these men, because they are the most colorful and controversial force in American film. They represent a throwback to the era when executives and producers—Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg, David O. Selznick, Sam Goldwyn, Harry Cohn, Darryl F. Zanuck, Jack Warner—were regarded as the decisive "creative" figures in American film. That may have been meant as a slur on our movies: how could moguls be more important than artists? But once upon a time, the would-be artists, the directors and the stars, took it for granted that the tycoons ran the show. When F. Scott Fitzgerald looked at Hollywood with that special mixture of wistful and mordant as he came to write his novel *The Last Tycoon*, he had no doubt but that a studio boss—he named him Monroe Stahr—should be the protagonist. Fitzgerald saw how much of the responsibility and the cultural decision-making rested on such a figure.

The best way to sum up the Weinsteins may be to say that, at the same time as the formation, the survival, and the considerable success of DreamWorks SKG, the amalgamation of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen, the lead story in the picture business has been the rise of Miramax, and the way in which it identified and exploited the audience for more challenging films than mainstream Hollywood was willing to risk. Miramax began cautiously by marketing a few foreign films. Next it moved to the territory of American independents. And by now it is a small studio run as if we were still in the 1920s, which is to say that Bob and Harvey act out the role of being in charge as if they were rowdy little boys who have never lost the urge to behave like Jimmy Cagney—or is it Groucho and Chico?

A better analogy to the 1920s is with Louis B. Mayer, not just tough, manipulative, devious, bullying, sentimental, but an actor playing all those parts. Indeed, veterans of the old MGM setup would admit that Mayer was not just the greatest or the most constant actor on the studio property, but a "shuteye"—a professional magician who had forgotten it was all a trick. Mayer really believed that he had made Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland into the proper children of America. This was dreadfully vulgar and a hideous shattering of the views of children built up in, say, *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*. (Don't smile at that comparison, not if you have any sense that the army of youth is one of the great cultural dangers in America now.) But people such as Mayer were crazy for show business, not just because it made them rich and powerful, with the opportunity to survey and to sample young female loveliness, but also to make the stories that would shape America and make it comfortable for barely educated Jewish escapees from Eastern Europe, guys who started selling gloves, furs, and hats and moved on to motion-picture stories.

I FIND IT HARD TO LOVE MOVIES without loving those guys. And so I like producers, and I enjoy the Weinsteins. Yes, I am prepared to accept Biskind's suggestion that there is hardly a female employee at Miramax who has not been reduced to tears over the years, and I do believe that in tantrums and foul-mouthed explosions Harvey Weinstein has thrown most bits of office equipment, and even punches, at his guys. But why did anyone go into the picture business if they didn't want melodrama, excitement, and stuff to tell Peter Biskind? Perhaps there are quiet days and calm routines in other trades, and there are Bartlebys there who have gone numb in their corners. Harvey loves pictures, he loves glory, he adores the gamble, and he thinks very well of Harvey. And such a package is essential if you are going to take it upon yourself to decide which movies get made and shown.

The Weinsteins have done badly by some pictures. They used to buy up more than they could handle properly. There is ample evidence of Harvey's urge to recut other people's pictures, even when he had no right; there are also cases where his suggestions and his cuts worked very well. Why not? Editorial revision is exactly the talent for which Thalberg, Selznick, Zanuck, and Jack Warner were known. Of course it is intrusive and interfering, but it comes with the laws of property, and do not ever forget that the people who put up the money own American pictures. (It is a rule that applies in the rest of the country, too.) The literature and the fans can choose to celebrate the directors, and no one should ever doubt that some directors are far better than others; but the studios and the moguls let those "artists" function. Orson Welles was not shy of being mistaken for a young god who could do anything and everything, but he needed RKO, and RKO stuck by him after Welles's rare liberty had elected to make an unnecessary and entirely schoolboyish attack on William Randolph Hearst.

The Weinsteins have made lurid mistakes in overpaying for some pictures and missing others altogether. But they

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have been the enablers of *sex, lies and videotape*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *The English Patient*, *Life Is Beautiful*, *Cold Mountain*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and so on. I don't like all those films. I hate some of them. But I think that several of them might not have reached the screen but for Miramax. And while it is true that the once-independent studio took on Disney as its master in 1993, this did not stop *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which was not to Disney's liking. Disney did prevent Miramax from going ahead with *The Lord of the Rings*, and its executives likely cringe every time that mistake is mentioned.

There is talk of some reshaping at Miramax, of Bob looking after the Disney connection while Harvey moves back toward independence. Miramax has also laid off 13 percent of its staff. It has not been a fat year. Now the studio has Scorsese's *The Aviator* as its Oscar shot. But will it fly? Harvey is young enough to do big things; he is also, as many have observed, a stress case ready to explode. Is there a risk of megalomania? Is his lifestyle dangerous? Orson Welles lived seventy years under the selfsame threats. This is show business, and if some people are in it for the art, others need to make money dance like Fred Astaire. ■

Richard Jenkyns
Tempest in a Cup

THE HOLY GRAIL: IMAGINATION AND BELIEF
By Richard Barber
(Harvard University Press, 464 pp., $27.95)

WHAT IS THE HOLY Grail? It is a dish or a cup or a stone or a reliquary or a mysterious object beyond description. It is a solid vessel, part of the regular life of its keepers, or it is a transcendent presence beheld only in a beatific vision. It is the eucharistic chalice, or a piece of magic that conjures up sumptuous viands. It held the wine at the Last Supper or it received the blood that flowed from Christ upon the cross. It is guarded by a beautiful young woman, or it may be seen only by a knight dedicated to virginity. It is a survival of pagan fertility rites, a Celtic cauldron, or an occult symbol whose secret meaning is preserved by the Freemasons, or by the Rosicrucians; an emblem of the Templars or of the Cathars, or an assertion of Catholic orthodoxy against heresy. It originates in France or Wales or Iran or Ossetia, or it is untraceably ancient, older than the earliest history. It was brought by Joseph of Arimathea to Glastonbury, or it was dug up in Antioch and exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair before finding a permanent home at the Cloisters in New York City. It is an awesome and sacred term, or it is a lazy, journalistic cliché (as in "'nude' tights are something of a holy grail," or—from chalice to plastic—"marvel at the 'Holy Grail' that is the original and indestructible Tupper Wonder Bowl").

What does the Grail signify? According to John Cowper Powys in *A Glastonbury Romance*, described by Richard Barber as "the most massive work of fiction centred on the Grail ever to be written," it is "the immemorial Mystery of Glastonbury":

> Christians had one name for this Power, the ancient heathen inhabitants had another, and a quite different one. Everyone who came to this spot seemed to draw something from it, attracted by a magnetism too powerful for anyone to resist, but as different people approached they changed its chemistry, though not its essence.... Older than Christianity, older than the Druids, older than the gods of Norsemen or Romans, older than the gods of Neolithic men, this many-named Mystery had been handed down to subsequent generations by three psychic channels; by the channel of popular renown, by the channel of inspired poetry, and by the channel of individual experience.

But this is more mist than mystery. Cowper's answer to the question of what the Grail signifies seems to be "just about anything," and "anything" is not far from "nothing." What we need is a cool-headed guide through the Grail's long and curious history, and in Richard Barber's lucid, fair-minded, and wide-ranging book, we get it.

THE BOOK FALLS IN EFFECT into two halves. In the first part, Barber traces the Grail's literary history from its first appearance in the last years of the twelfth century through the explosion of Grail romances in the first part of the thirteenth century and on until the end of the Middle Ages. In the second part, he explores the revival of the Grail idea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We first meet the Grail in Chrétien de Troyes's poem *Le Conte du Graal*, around 1190. Here already are many features of the story that will return in later tellings: Perceval, the future knight brought up in isolation in the forest (in later avatars Percival, Perslevaus, Parzival, Parsifal); the waste land; and the wounded king whom the hero is to cure. The appearance of the Grail itself is not described, but it is referred to as "such a holy thing."

Chrétien left the work unfinished, and this encouraged a number of other writers to carry the story onward, to produce new works around the Grail. One of these was Robert de Boron, who "sanctifies the Grail," in Barber's words, and gives it a history: in his account it was the dish used at the Last Supper, and was then employed by Joseph of Arimathea to collect the blood of the dying Christ; later in the story it becomes associated with Merlin, King Arthur, and the knights of the Round Table. By contrast, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the work that seems to command Barber's greatest affection, is decorative, exotic, and fantastical; in this account the Grail is a stone residing in a elegant court that magically produces delicious food and drink.

Before long, variant stories linked the Grail to Lancelot and thus to chivalry and romance, to Galahad and the quest for a kind of beatific vision, to Gawain (halfway between Lancelot and Gala-

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had), and to King Arthur and "the matter of England." One of these romances mentioned a "valley of Avaron." This may well have meant Avallon in Burgundy, but it was soon transferred to Avalon, the area around Glastonbury. In the course of the thirteenth century, it was decided both that Joseph of Arimathea had brought the Grail to Glastonbury and that Arthur was buried there.

So WHERE DID THE GRAIL STORY come from? Barber's own theory is magnificently simple: it was Chrétien de Troyes's own invention. Literary scholars claim to balance tradition and the individual talent, but the truth is that they tend to find originality uncomfortable: the fact of something being purely and entirely new seems to leave them with nothing to say, whereas if everything comes from somewhere else, they have a useful job of investigation to do. And shiny new words like "intertextuality" can give a sophisticated gloss to this *déformation professionelle*. So at minimum Barber's proposal is refreshing. But it also seems persuasive. He points out how many Grail romances were produced before 1240, and it certainly looks as though authors were reacting to the stimulus of an exciting new idea. He also argues that none of Chrétien's other works is spiritual or religious, and that his Grail, though a sacred object, does not seem to veil a hidden meaning, allegory, or ritual. Chrétien seems unaware of any arcane or exotic source for the Grail, and it is very unlikely that any of his successors independently dug one up. Instead we watch the Grail growing new meanings by a process of accretion, as a hulk grows barnacles.

If this is right, a heavy freight of theories about the Grail's origins, ranging from the reasonable to the insane, can now be jettisoned. Among these many theories, one is still worth recalling, because it has remained accidentally famous and because it does have some historical interest. Few people would now remember Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, first published in 1920, had T. S. Eliot not declared it to be the largest influence on "The Waste Land." Her claim was that the Grail story was a survival of pagan fertility rites. Today this theory seems all too obviously of its period, like those epic film evocations of ancient Rome that one can date to the nearest five years or so from the hairstyles and the color of the lipstick. (Or one might think of Van Meegeren's forgeries of Vermeer, which fooled the experts at the time but now seem to us so clearly to be not only fakes but 1930s fakes.)

Weston's approach belongs with Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (to which she was heavily indebted) and the school of "Cambridge ritualists" who followed in Frazer's wake; it is an outgrowth of a fashion for finding in ritual, anthropology, and the primitive the key to all mythologies. In reality, Weston made two mistakes—a historical mistake and a mistake of method. Barber points out the historical mistake: Weston put strong emphasis on the waste land, which is a minor theme in all but the very late romances. In Chrétien's story, the land is desolate not for any magical reason but simply because there is no one to defend it from marauders. His picture derives not from symbol or allegory but from the realities of feudal life.

Weston's mistake of method is exemplified in her claim that "no theory of the origin of the story can be considered really and permanently satisfactory, unless it can offer an explanation of the story as a whole ... and of the varying forms assumed by the Grail." As Barber shows, the Grail changes because literature evolves, and because good writers have a care for originality. We can watch the story putting out new growths and mutating as it passes from one poet to another. A theory that purports to explain the story as a whole and all the Grail's varying forms is almost certain to be wrong.

AFTER THE RENAISSANCE, THE medieval romances were neglected for some centuries, until a revival of interest in the Romantic age, which is the starting point for the second half of Barber's book. Antiquarianism, nationalism, medievalism, Catholic sacramentalism, and a hunger for all things Celtic were among the forces behind the Grail's revival. Cooler spirits were less impressed: Max Beerbohm, in the caption to one of his cartoons, was to imagine "the sole remark likely to have been made by Benjamin Jowett" to Dante Gabriel Rossetti when he saw his Arthurian murals in the Oxford Union: "And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it?" Tennyson was bound to include the Grail in his Arthurian epic *Idylls of the King*, and Barber nicely studies the ambivalence of his response. On the one hand, he depicts it as a mystic and authentic vision of the divine, achieved through prayer and renunciation; on the other hand, Arthur himself declines to join in the quest for the Grail, because he has the practical and beneficent work of kingship to do. In this interpretation of the theme, the Catholic and Protestant sides of the Anglican church, as it were, are seen in a creative tension.

Barber must inevitably concern himself with works of the second rank in his chapters on the nineteenth century, but there is one enormous exception: the colossal achievement of Wagner's *Parsifal*, perhaps his greatest opera. Barber, for his part, seems rather cool about it (his heart is evidently in the Middle Ages), and perhaps that is just as well, since otherwise it might threaten to overwhelm his book. Still, his medieval researches do help to illuminate Wagner's purposes, more perhaps than he realizes. Wagner's principal source was Wolfram von Eschenbach—this is where we find Parsifal's parents, Gamuret and Herzeleide, as well as Kundry, Amfortas, and Montsalvat; but whereas in Wolfram the Grail is a stone, Wagner has made it a cup again, and whereas Wolfram's Grail is attended by fair damsels, the guardians of Wagner's Grail are knights dedicated to chastity. In other words, the religious and sacral character of the opera is derived not so much from Wagner's main source as from his deliberate departures from it. Nietzsche, who had once idolized Wagner, turned violently against what he saw as his former hero's capitulation to Christianity, and since then a number of interpreters, and a good many recent productions of the opera, have tried to minimize its Christian element. Barber, wrongly, goes along with this. "The figure on the Cross," he says, "remains a universal symbol, not the historical figure of Christ himself," and "there is a conscious avoidance of specifically Christian reference." This is simply untrue.

In one sense it is disputable that *Parsifal* is a Christian work: one may feel that Wagner uses the Christian story not out of faith, from within, but as a powerfully expressive myth, one that he can shape to his own purposes, as in the *Ring* he used the gods of northern mythology—and no one supposes that he literally believed in them. Kundry in particular seems to be released into a glorious, self-immolating nothingness—

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more Buddhistic than Christian—like so many of Wagner's earlier heroines: Senta, Isolde, Brünnhilde. I used to think that *Parsifal* was indeed Christian only "from the outside," but now I am not so sure. What is untenable, anyway, is the claim that Wagner avoids Christian reference. It is true that Christ is never named, but he is recurrently spoken of, most often as the Redeemer. We hear explicitly about the Last Supper, the transformation of bread and wine in the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, and the doctrine of the Atonement. Gurnemanz even corrects Parsifal on the theological significance of Good Friday. There is not much ambiguity about that.

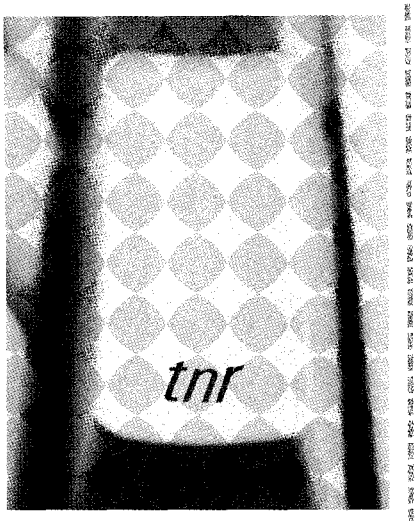
Barber observes that for Wagner the Grail is "not the object of a quest," but a "symbol of the faith which motivates the knights." The first part of this antithesis is a valuable insight, but the second part is not quite right. Barber has shown us how often the Grail has been conceived as a supernatural existence, mysteriously appearing and vanishing, or beheld only in a state of exalted vision. It is significant, therefore, that Wagner makes it a solid physical object, fixed in a determinate place. His Grail is neither mystic nor symbolic; it is sacramental. Given all the different ways in which he might have represented the Grail—so well explicated by Barber—he chooses to make it eucharistic: the ceremony of the Grail is the site where our solid, sublunary world interacts with the transcendent.

There is a last and more subjective consideration. As Gurnemanz takes Parsifal to the Grail ceremony in the first act, he tells him about a dissolution of boundaries: "Here time becomes one with space." Perhaps the opera's conclusion invites us to another kind of dissolution of boundaries. For it ends with an act of worship, the eucharistic rite enacted, the knights kneeling in prayer, Parsifal holding the Grail aloft to bless them, and a dove and a ray of divine light descending from the dome above. Listeners (and directors, for that matter) may differ in their responses to this, but it does seem designed to attenuate the division between action and audience, and to invite us to feel ourselves as part of the congregation. The original intention was that *Parsifal* should be performed only at Bayreuth, where conductor and orchestra are invisible and do not interpose themselves between the audience and the stage.

Eliot alludes recurrently to Wagner in "The Waste Land" and the Grail story underlies the whole poem, but only once does he allude to Wagner's *Parsifal* as such, and indirectly, in a quotation from Verlaine's poem on the opera. This indirectness carries its own meaning, expressing how modern versions of the Grail myth are the result of long accretion—interpretations of interpretations. With *Parsifal* and "The Waste Land," Barber confronts two of the most influential works of their respective centuries, but as his journey takes him nearer to the present day, he must sojourn much of the time among cranks, pseudo-mystics, and misty-eyed stumblers through the Celtic twilight. (It is curious that he does not mention Michael Tippett's opera *The Midsummer Marriage*, probably the most ambitious exploitation of the Grail story in the second half of the last century.)

It would be easy enough to make fun of much of this, but Barber wisely plays it straight, giving us an intriguing tour through some of the byways of twentieth-century literary history. He does allow himself to be entertained by the recent journalistic debasement of the term "holy grail"—something that has sharply increased, apparently, in the last ten years—including the two examples that I quoted near the start of this review. But it is not the only debasement that the Grail and the corona of associations around it have suffered.

If you go to Glastonbury today, you will find that this Somerset market town has been almost completely taken over by New Age fantasy. Nearly every shop seems to be selling tarot cards, books about ley lines, or mystic amulets. The air is full of happy young voices, some with American accents. In the pubs a few locals can still be found drinking stolidly, in the old style, but wreathed in the scent of their neighbors' recreational chemicals. At times the street scene prompts one to wonder if the town has been chosen as the location for a film about dropping out in the 1960s. Some people find the whole thing inspiring, others amusing, while yet others may feel a little sad at this slide into a woozy semi-spirituality. We seem some distance from the nobler parts of Barber's story, and his ringing declaration that "the Holy Grail offers us, in imagination, the possibility of perfection" and that "as a whole our journey has been set among the highest and most challenging ideas of the human spirit." ■



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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Cracking Up

IF YOU CARE ABOUT WASHINGTON, you inevitably expend enormous quantities of breath defending the place. You develop a long enemies list. There are the populist bullies, such as George W. Bush, who bash the inside-the-Beltway mentality. Then there are the New York snobs, the populists' strange bedfellows, who dismiss Washington as a dowdy provincial capital like Brasilia or Canberra, without the access to Prada and foie gras that a great city demands. But, after vigorously championing Washington, there are moments when severe self-doubt sets in. Those are usually the moments when your fellow citizens turn around, as they did last week, and elect Marion Barry.

I FIRST MET BARRY AS THE ELEVEN-year-old president of Ben W. Murch Elementary School's student council. Barry had come to grace a Murch Appreciation Day assembly. My presidential duties included greeting Barry and introducing him. "I'm Frankie Foer, your honor." "Good to meet you, Freddie," he replied. "It's Frankie," I said sheepishly. As he spoke in front of the student body, he turned and stared at me. "I wanted to congratulate your president, Freddie." Why couldn't he get my name straight? And why did his arm seem like a windshield wiper, constantly clearing his wet brow with a handkerchief despite the day's crispness? That there might be a biochemical explanation for his lack of short-term memory and profusion of sweat didn't occur to my young mind.

WHEN THE FBI BUSTED BARRY WITH A crack pipe at the Vista Hotel in 1990, that explanation became all too clear. By then, I had switched to private school, where Barry, the nabbed cad, emerged as a subject of endless fascination. The names of players in his trial, such as R. Kenneth Mundy and Rasheeda Moore, were tossed about in hallway banter. Kids wore THE BITCH SET ME UP T-shirts to class, blaring Barry's famous response to the sting. While we greeted Barry's arrest with irony, our parents reacted with fury. As Barry deflected attention from his misdeeds with racial demagoguery, it seemed he wanted to punish our unsympathetic, mostly white Northwest neighborhoods.

THE BARRY ADMINISTRATION NEVER handled snow deftly. During the storm of 1987, which dumped 21 inches on the city, Barry wasn't around; apparently, he had collapsed after coking up in the Beverly Hills Hilton. But, after his arrest, the streets of our anti-Barry ward seemed to be part of a deliberate no-plow zone. From our homes, which turned into snow prisons, we watched TV reports showing cars moving freely around poorer neighborhoods, Barry redoubts. Interestingly, one of the mayor's cronies lived around the corner from our house. His street and alley were immaculately cleared. But, given the impassable blocks around our neighborhood, this gesture did him little good. In the Barry era, even the distribution of graft was inept.

BARRY HAS DONE SO MUCH TO DESTROY this city—its reputation, finances, racial comity—that it's hard not to view his return to the city council as a harbinger of apocalypse. On election night, as *The Washington Post* reported it, Barry told a crowd, "This is a victory not only for Marion Barry but for God and the people of Ward Eight," while a man in a beret chanted, "Black Power! Black Power!" This is the kind of scene one associates with the old self-aggrandizing coterie of demagogic urban leaders. But, truth be told, Barry's victory is not a seismic event nor a revanchist victory for a brand of racial politics that most pundits buried as a spent force. It is merely a final triumph for Barry's once-powerful machine. This time, the machine used 16 minivans to draw about 4,000 people to the polls in an economically blighted area—hardly enough to qualify as portentous, let alone a voter revolt.

WASHINGTONIANS HAVE A POWERFUL device for understanding Barry: His ever-changing wardrobe, which has yielded its own branch of semiotics. When he arrived in Washington as a young black nationalist, he donned the dashiki. This ensemble, however, didn't fit his ambitions for city-wide success. As he curried favor with downtown developers, he switched to buttery suits, blue shirts with white pinpoint collars, and silk ties. Of course, the efficacy of this look eventually faded, too. After the Vista bust, when he needed to portray himself as a victim of The Man, the Kente cloth and Africana came back out of the closet. Finally, with this current return to the political arena, he has campaigned in a beige suit and a Panama hat. He looks like an aging caudillo, one of the corrupt elites who once desperately clung to power in Latin America.

BUT ALARMISM OVER BARRY'S RETURN isn't merely unjustified, it tramples enjoyment of the moment's ironies. Barry, who once hosted a cruise to reward 200 government employees for planning an event that never happened, has returned as a champion of good government: opposing taxpayer subsidization of a baseball stadium. "These [baseball] owners stick you up. I won't let them stick you up," he has said, quite honorably. Honorably, that is, if you forget that Barry courted baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn in 1979 to bring a team to Washington. Does anyone doubt that he would have promised his own treasury-depleting enticements to a potential owner? Secondly, by becoming the leading spokesman for the anti-stadium cause, he essentially guarantees his movement's defeat. His most important potential allies, white Northwest liberals, consider Barry a bogeyman and will do everything to stymie him.

FITTINGLY, BARRY'S VICTORY COINCIDES with Joe Gibbs's second tour coaching the Washington Redskins. Barry and Gibbs are the tallest figures in recent city life. Both invoke nostalgia for the early '80s, a moment when Washington still looked like it might fulfill Home Rule's promise. But their paths starkly diverged. After he first retired, Gibbs became a successful businessman. He toned up his Hershey-fed body, and his skin fitted more tightly around his stern face. Retirement wasn't as kind to Barry. He struggles to climb podiums. His face looks gaunt. And, unlike Gibbs's visage, it is sapped of vitality, the cost of hard living. He continues in politics because he just can't leave the political scene, much as he could never leave hotel room parties. After a singular career, he has become a cliché: The historic figure who can't admit that he is history.

FRANKLIN FOER

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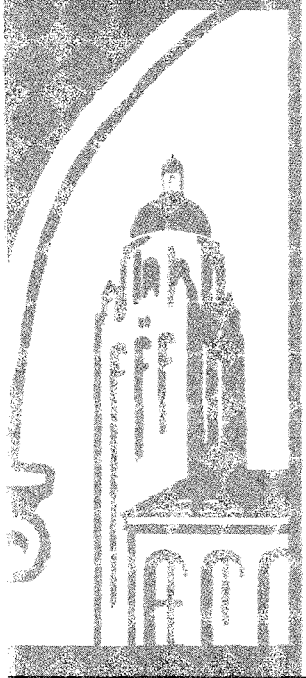

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

A strange thing happened in the Senate earlier this year. Thirty-one Republican senators joined forty-six Democrats in voting to increase federal child care funding by an additional $6 billion over the next five years, or by 25 percent. The vote was seen as a direct rebuff to the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress, who had called for a more modest $1 billion increase.

In some respects the vote was moot, being dependent on the reauthorization of welfare reform—which languished and then died at the hands of a Senate parliamentary procedure.

But **the debate over child care funding signals a shift in conviction. For the first time a powerful group of Republicans believe that a major component of welfare reform is lacking.**

Is welfare-related child care really underfunded? Let's take a quick look.

When Congress debated welfare reform in 1996, annual child care funding totaled $3.2 billion. In the six years after its enactment, total child care funding increased 250 percent, to some $11 billion.

Surprisingly, the additional resources were not primarily the result of new government spending. Welfare reform allowed states to use the money they saved by moving welfare recipients off the rolls and into jobs to help pay for child care expenses. As a result of these transfers, more than twice as many children received subsidized child care in 2002 than did in 1996.

Another way to examine the adequacy of child care funding is to look at the results of welfare reform. If women with children were not securing work, were failing to keep jobs, or were reenrolling in welfare, that would be a clear signal that the system was failing in its mission.

No such evidence exists. Welfare roles have been cut in half—to levels not seen since 1970. Employment rates of single mothers with children under age six (those with the greatest need for child care) are 13 percentage points higher than in the booming 1990s. And nearly three million fewer children are in poverty today because their mothers' earnings continue to rise.

What's really behind the call for more federal child care funding is a political mind-set that views our nation's wealth as an endless resource for solving societal ills. From this perspective, any need can be met if enough money is allocated to it. No matter how many times this formula fails to work and even exacerbates the problem, it never really dies.

The end to no-limit child care funding will come when our elected officials realize that welfare reform is not just about lifting families out of poverty. It's about a return to personal responsibility and civic compassion that will safeguard millions of women and children against future dependency.

—Jeffrey M. Jones

Jeff Jones is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution. This essay is adapted from an essay in the forthcoming/fall issue of the Hoover Digest, *which will appear in mid-October. To receive a free issue of the* Digest, *call 800.935.2882.*

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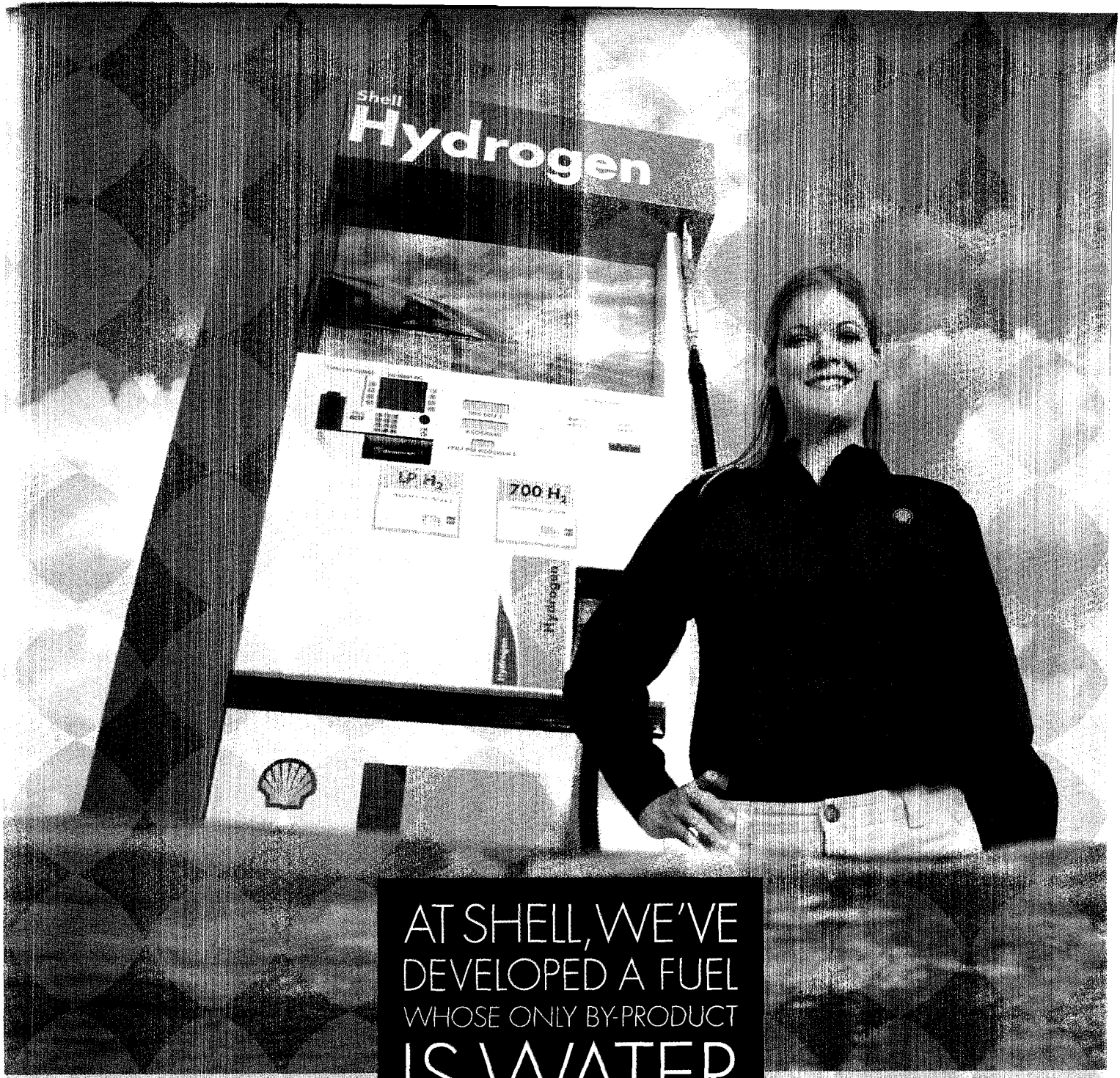

AT SHELL, WE'VE DEVELOPED A FUEL WHOSE ONLY BY-PRODUCT IS WATER. HOW REFRESHING.

The promise of hydrogen is exciting, but commercial viability is a long-term prospect. At Shell there's progress toward the promise, thanks to a commitment to make the hydrogen economy a reality.

Key to this progress are strategic relationships with leading companies like General Motors and people like Kristin Andrichik, Business Development Advisor with Shell Hydrogen (U.S.). Kristin works to capitalize on Shell leadership in fueling technologies and GM's expertise in vehicle technology to determine the best path toward the commercialization.

The centerpiece of this union is the nation's first hydrogen refueling dispenser at a retail site, which supports a fleet of GM hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

Ultimately, commercialization will depend on individuals choosing hydrogen. And through the efforts of Kristin and others like her, Shell is ready to meet those needs.

Visit www.shell.com/newenergies for details on this and other Shell activities.

"Shell Hydrogen" refers to a global business of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group and consists of separate companies set up to pursue and develop business opportunities related to hydrogen and fuel cells.

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